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## PHILOSOPHY: EAST-WEST PERSPECTIVES

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# Editorial

The announced theme of this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* is "War and Peace". We will take up this theme for discussion in the next number. In this issue we are dealing with philosophy, and it is entitled "Philosophy: East-West Perspectives". Philosophy tries to answer the basic and ultimate questions about this cosmos and about human existence. If this is true, all peoples, all countries, all cultural circles have their own answers to these questions, and consequently their own philosophies. Of course, each individual also has his/her own philosophy and worldview. However, the philosophical tradition of humankind is broadly divided into broad divisions: East and West. In the West systematic and articulate philosophical culture and tradition were initiated by the Greeks. Greek philosophy exerted tremendous influence on western culture and Christianity.

Among the eastern philosophies, Indian philosophy has preeminent place. India definitely has a very ancient tradition of philosophy and metaphysical thinking. The Vedas [1500-1200 BCE], which, of course, are preeminently religious and ritualistic in their orientations and contents, contained also seeds and modes of philosophical thinking, which eventually grew and flowered in the celebrated treatises called 'Upanisads' [800-500 BCE]. Then there was steady and consistent progress of philosophical thinking and metaphysical activities in India till perhaps the twelfth century CE. I presume the golden era of Indian philosophy and Sanskritic culture was between 500 BCE and 500 CE. Eminent philosophers, poets, grammarians, lawgivers, litterateurs, literary critics and commentators of foundational texts lived in this period and enriched Indian thought, culture and spirituality.

In India philosophy is basically an intense quest to know the essence of human person, and thereby to understand the mystery of life and self. It is a quest to grasp the permanent, steady and central principle beyond the finite, changing and unsteady body and physical structures. Philosophy is vision, *darsana*, of Reality in its totality and wholeness, with its cause-effect relations, essence and qualities, etc. For the correct vision the seekers need also the correct spiritual and mental dispositions. Philosophizing, therefore, is a spiritual act. A philosopher in this respect, is not only a lover and inquirer of wisdom, but also a lover and seeker of the vision of Reality, a spiritual aspirant.

Human nature and intellectual traits of humanity being similar, it is natural that there are striking parallels and similarities between eastern and western philosophies and philosophers.

The Faculty of Philosophy of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram (DVK), Bangalore has launched a new series of publications entitled 'Dharmaram Philosophy Series'. This would provide a forum for the members of the Faculty to articulate their philosophical views and positions. The first volume of this series was precisely on the theme under discussion. Some of the essays of this book are reproduced here for the benefit of the readers of *Journal of Dharma.* Parts of this editorial are also from my editorial to the above-mentioned book. But this issue of the Jounral also carry some new articles, namely, articles of Gopal Stavig, Paul Palatty and Jojo Joseph. I express my heart-felt thanks to all the contributors. Those who would like a more comprehensive reading on this subject may kindly refer the book mentioned above, namely, *Western Encounter with Indian Philosophy,* edited by Augustine Thottakara, cmi, and published by Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore.

**Chief Editor**

# TRANSMIGRATIONS IN THE UPANISHADS AND THE GREEK THOUGHT

**Gabriel Aranjaniyil**[♦]

Transmigration is a belief taken for granted in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It was during the Upanishads period that this belief became prevalent in India. The Upanishads, during the formation of which Buddhism and Jainism arose as a reaction to Brahmanic Hinduism, first taught this doctrine. Among the Greeks, it was Plato who gave a significant role to this theory in his philosophy. His philosophy is close to the Upanishadic view in many ways. He wrote his dialogues when the later Upanishads were taking shape. This article is an attempt to study the Upanishadic and Platonic views of Transmigration. The term 'transmigration' means the passage of the soul from one body to another. Other terms used are 'rebirth', 'reincarnation', and 'metempsychosis'. Reincarnation sometimes is used in a specific sense: the passage of the soul from one body to another in the same species, while transmigration includes other species also.

## I

### 1. Upanishadic View of Transmigration

Transmigration was taught in the Upanishads as a secret doctrine like that of Brahman and *Ātman*. It was a new teaching not known to the Brahmins as testified by *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya* Upanishads.[1] The Upanishadic sages who were very much interested in the destiny of man and his condition after death formulated many eschatological theories. Though these theories took shape in the context of sacrifices and rituals, they actually seem to have risen from a reaction to the theory and practice of Brahmanic sacrifices and rituals. During the Brahmanic times, the sacrifices became so important that on these the harmony of the cosmos, the well-being of man and the power and prosperity of the gods depended. "By means of sacrifice the gods obtained that supreme authority which

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[*] Belief in rebirth is found in *Atharvaveda,* 12,2,52.

[1] *Br.Up.*6,2; *Cha.Up.* 5,3

now they wield".[2] It was by sacrifice that man built his heavenly self.[3] The Brahmins alone had access to this absolute power because of their knowledge of the sacrifice and the rituals.

The *Araṇyaka* theology, which replaced the actual performance of the various Vedic sacrifices and rituals with contemplation, manifests the reaction to the exaltation of Brahmanic power, and speaks about the liberation of the human spirit and shows the emergence of philosophic thought. The perfect observance of the Vedic prescription entitled man to earthly prosperity and heavenly enjoyment. The Upanishadic views asserted the radical insufficiency of Brahmanic religion by teaching transmigration (*samsāra*), which was the fate of those who practiced it.

## 2. The Path of the Soul after Death

There are different descriptions about the journey of the soul after death.

*(a) Knowledge of the path in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad;*

Heaven, rain-could, earth, man and woman are sacrificial fires. At death man is laid in the funeral fire and the gods offer him in that fire. Man arises from this offering with the colour of light. Those who know this and those who worship with faith (*śraddhā*) go to the Brahma-world and they never return to the earth.

Those who know this, and those too who in the forest truly worship (*upāsate*) with faith (*śraddhā*), pass into the flame (of the cremation-fire); from the flame, into the day; from the day, into the half moth of the waxing moon, onto the six months during which the sun moves northward; from these months, into the world of the gods (*devaloka*); from the world of the gods, into the sun; from the sun, into the lightening-fire. A person (*purusa*) consisting of mind (*manas*) goes to those regions of lightning and conducts them to the Brahma-worlds. In those Brahma-worlds they dwell for long extends. Of these there is no return (*Br.Up.*6, 2,15).

Those who perform sacrifice and do good deeds are born again:

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[2] *Śathapatha-brāhmana (S.B.),* 3,2,2,1.

[3] *S.B.* 4,3,4,1-5

> But they who by sacrificial offering, charity, and austerity conquer the worlds, pass into the smoke (of the cremation-fire); from the smoke, into the night; from the night, in to the half moth of the waning moon; from the half month of the waning moon, into the six months during which the sun moves southward; from those, months, into the world of the fathers; from the world of the fathers, into the moon. Reaching the moon, they become food. There the gods - as they say to King Soma, "Increase! Decrease!" - even so they feed upon them there. When that passes away for them, then they pass forth into this space; from space, into air; from air, into rain; from rain, into the earth. On reaching the earth they become food. Again they are offered in the fire of man. Thence they are born in the fore of woman. Rising up into the world, they cycle round again thus. But those who know not these two ways, become crawling and flying insects and whatever there is here that bites (*Br.Up*.6,2,16).

Here we notice that the actual performance of Vedic rituals and the observance of Vedic prescription are substituted by knowledge of the right path of the soul. Man should know that his life itself is a sacrifice and this life which is the product of the sacrifice of heave, rain, earth, man and woman, is again offered by the gods at his death. And man rises gain from this sacrifice in brilliant form. The knowledge of this sacrifice leads man to the world of Brahma to be eternally there. The whole cosmic process whose climax is reached in human life is contemplated as a sacrifice and this knowledge wins lasting life for man. Those who lack this superior knowledge and put their trust in Vedic sacrifices and good works attain the world of the moon where they enjoy the fruits of their good works until they are exhausted only to return to this earth to be born again as human beings. There are still others who neither possess the superior knowledge nor carry out the Vedic prescriptions and who lead a wicked life. They do not have any reward in the other world, but become insects troubling others.

### *(b) Chāndogya Upanishad on the nature of rebirth:*

The same teaching is found in *Ch.Up*. 5,4-10, which throws some more light on the nature of rebirth in the following passage:

> Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here-the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahmin, or the womb of a Kshatriya, or the womb of a Vaisya. But those who are of stinking conduct here-the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcast (*Caṇḍāla*) (*Ch.Up.*5.10,7).

Those who are reborn, will be born as a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya or Vaisya according to the degree of goodness they have acquired; the bad will be born as a dog or a swine or an outcast according to the degree of their wickedness.

### (c) *The Journey of the soul in Kaushitaki and Prasna Upanishads:*

In Kaushitaki Upanishad, it is the knowledge of Brahman that saves the soul from rebirth. After death everybody goes to the moon where their esoteric knowledge will be tested. If they know that the waning moon is the cause of rebirth and the door of heaven, they will be allowed to go forward; otherwise they will return to the earth to be born again as a worm or insect or fish or animal or as a human being, according to their deeds and knowledge. The man, who passes in the test, proceeds through the various heavenly worlds, one superior to the other and, finally, reaches the world of Brahma. Then he advances to the throne of Brahman and is liable to fall at any time on encountering the many obstacles. As he proceeds conquering the obstacles, he leaves behind him his good and bad deeds. In the end he ascends the throne of Brahma and will have to undergo the last test, concerning his identity. If he knows that he is the same as Brahman, he will inherit the Brahma-world.[4]

For *Praśna Upanishad,* it is the knowledge of Atman that wins the Brahma-wold. Those who seek Atman with faith and austerity reach the sun through the northern course and will not be born again.[5]

## 3. The Reasons for Transmigration

Due to ignorance people think that this wold is everything and there is no other world; and because of this they are born again and again.[6] The soul of man is like a rider in a chariot. The soul travels towards its[7] destiny in the chariot of the body with the intellect as driver and the senses as horses. The man who has no understanding and who is not pure will not reach the goal--the absolute Atman. Yogic discipline (controlling the senses, mind and thoughts), instruction and faith are needed to know Atman. Those who do not proceed on the way towards *Ātman* are bound to be born again.[8] Those who put their trust in sacrifices and rituals are born again when their merits are exhausted in the other world.[9] The fundamental reason for rebirth is the desire (*kāma*) in man.[10] Here the desire means the desire of things that Atman or Brahman.

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[4] *Kau.Up.* 1.

[5] *Prasn Up.* 1,9-10; see *Chad.Up.*4,15.

## 4. One's Actions Determine the Rebirth

When a man (one who is faithful to the Vedic prescriptions) dies, the departing soul makes for itself a new form--either that of the father, a *gandharva* or a god or some other being according to the nature of his actions. The reason for this transformation is the relation between man and his actions:

> According as one acts, according as one conducts himself, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good. The doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by action, bad by bad action.
>
> But people say: 'A person is made (not of acts, but) of desires only.' (In reply to this I say) As is his desire, such is his resolve; as is his resolve, such the actin he performs; what action (*karma*) he performs, that he procures for himself (Br.Up.4,4,5).

If man's mind is set on some good he will become that good; if it is set on bad he will become bad.[11] According to the degree of goodness or wickedness he has acquired by his deeds at the time of this departure, he will become a new being ascending the scale of goodness or descending the scale of wickedness.[12] Therefore, man is responsible for his future life. He determines the nature of his next life by the actions he performs.

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[6] *Katha.Up.* 2,6.

[7] The pronoun 'it' is used when sul stands for the *Atman.*

[8] *Katha. Up.* 3,5.

[9] *Br.Up.* 6,2, *Chad.Up.*5,10, *Prasna Up. 1,9, Mund.Up.*1,2.

[10] *Mundaka Up.* 3,2, *Br.Up. 4,4, Prasna Up.*3,3,.

[11] *Ch.Up.*5,10.

## 5. The End of Transmigration

Transmigration is terminated by true knowledge. This knowledge will differ according to the different seers of the Upanishads. For some, man should know the right path of the soul to the Brahma-world, but for most of them it is the knowledge of the absolute reality called, some times Atman, and sometimes Brahman or Purusha.

The man whose desire is Atman goes to Brahman on his departure from this world.[13] When a man beholds Atman he is freed from sorrow and liberated from birth.[14] The great sorrow of man is the endless chain of successive lives to which he is condemned. Those who know Atman become passionless, perfect, and are liberated from death.[15] Again, the seekers of the soul reach the sun after death and never return from there.[16] The Brahma-knowers, become merged in Brahman and are liberated from rebirth.[17] For *Śvetāśvatara Upanishad,* the liberating knowledge is the knowledge of the personal god who is the supreme Lord.

Over both the perishable and the soul the One God (deva) rules. By meditation upon him, by union with him, and by entering into His being, more and more, there is finally cessation from every illusion (*maha-nivṛtti).* By knowing God (deva) there is a falling off of all fetters; with distress destroyed, there is cessation of birth and death (*Śveta.Up.*1,10 and 11).

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[12] *Ch.Up.* 5,10; *Kau Up.*1,2; *Katha. Up.* 3,7; 5,7. *Mund.Up.*1,9 *and* `10; *Sve.Up.*5,7; *Maitri.Up.*3,2.

[13] *Br.Up.*4,4,6.

[14] *Katha, Up.*2,10&38.

[15] Mund.Up.3,2.

[16] *Prasna.Up.*1,10.

[17] *Sve.Up.*2,7.

## II

## DOCTRINE OF TRANSMIGRATION IN GREEK THOUGHT

### 6. Plato on Transmigration

The doctrine of transmigration in Greek thoughts is based on the philosophy of Plato. The changing visible world is intelligible because of the subsistent and eternal ideas in imitation of which it is formed. The human soul lies between the ideas and the changing universe. It is the intelligent principle behind every change. Man, who is animated by the soul, has two parts: the soul, the immortal and eternal part, formed by the creator; and the mortal part, the body, produced by the younger gods.[18] The soul, which partakes of the nature of the ideas, is the true being and this attachment to this body is a degradation of the soul and a hindrance to her goal, which is the contemplation of the ideas in the spiritual world. The soul has two basic tendencies: the first towards the good, the noble; and the second towards the bad.

Plato is not quite sure about the reason for her attachment to the body. Sometimes he sees it as a result of son and sometimes as something natural. Plato did not formulate a systematic theory about the destiny of the soul after death but touched upon it in his dialogues whenever the occasion demanded it.

#### (a) *Account of soul's destiny in Phaedrus*

Plato's treatment of the soul in Phaedrus gives us his principal lines of thought regarding the soul and her migration. Every soul is entrusted with the case of the inanimate. The soul, in her perfect form, flees throughout the universe controlling it; but when her wings are lost, she falls down and clings to something solid and ends up in taking to herself an earthly bond, which moves itself because of the soul. This fall is due to the inability of the soul to control its powers. The soul can be likened to a winged travel through the universe drawn by two horse, one fair and good and the other ugly and evil. During the revolutions through the heaves, the souls cannot keep their looks fixed on the beautiful realities (ideas) because of the evil horse which struggles to have mastery over the good horse and, consequently, many souls loose their wings or have them damaged. If a soul manages to follow in the track of the gods and have the vision of truth, then she is kept from misfortune. But when she fails to do so, loosing her wings, she falls down to the earth.

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[18] *Timaeus, 426.*

If she has seen most of the reality upon becoming man, she will grow into a seeker of wisdom and beauty. Others, according to the knowledge of reality, will be born as a king, a solider, a trader, a prophet a priest, a sophist, a tyrant and so on. This will be the firsts incarnation of the soul. If the soul leads a righteous life he will have a better lot in the next life and if unrighteous a worse lot. Anyway the soul will not regain her former life before ten thousand years unless she seeks wisdom consistently. If she has chose a philosophical life in three successive revolutions of a thousand years, regaining her wigs, she flies to her destination. The remaining ones after their first life are taken to the place of punishment or are born again according to their merits. They are born again and then the soul of a man may enter into a beast and the soul in beast goes back to a man. The soul of a philosopher alone can recover her wings. It is necessary to turn to the spiritual realities making use of the memories of the vision of the forms, which the soul once enjoyed. But only a few can remember much when they discern the likeness of spiritual realities in the things of the visible world.[19]

### *(b) Phaedo on the souls of the dead*

In the early dialogue *Phaedo,* it is stated in the form a legend that the souls of the dead exist in another world and they return here.[20] From this book we get some more information about transmigration. If at the time of the release. the soul is pure and has not been contaminated by the body since it has never willingly associated with it and has pursued philosophy actually practicing it, she will go to the divine world where she will enjoy bliss. But if she is tainted and impure at the time of release because she has willingly associated with the bond, immersed in passions and pleasures not mindful of the invisible and intelligible realities, she will be weighed down and dragged back into the world where she will wander through the graveyards and will be finally imprisoned again in a body. Such men will become animals according to the character they have acquired. Gluttonous and selfish men assume the life of a donkey or some other animal like it. The irresponsible and the violent become wolves or hawks or some other animal similar to these. Ordinary good people, however, become some disciplined creatures like bees and ants or even decent citizens. But nobody can attain the divine nature without pursuing philosophy. Until one consistently seeks wisdom he will pass from one body to another according to the nature of his desires. Philosophy persuades the imprisoned soul to refrain from using the senses, to recollect, to turn her gaze inward and contemplate the invisible divine realities. This philosophical life frees the soul from desires and helps to lead her to the divine world.[21]

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[19] *Phaedrus,* 246-50.

[20] *Phaedo,* 70 d.

## 7. Transmigration in Other Books of Plato

*Meno*, which is an early book, without going into details or giving the reasons says that the soul is born again and again.[22] *Republic* states the idea that the souls are given certain freedom to choose their lives and if one consistently loved wisdom he will finally become happy.[23]

According to *Timaeus,* the first incarnation is not due to the sin but is just natural. The creator of the universe, after shaping the gods, made the souls and fixed each one to a star. He had fashioned the immortal parts (souls) of all living beings and wanted the gods to make the mortal parts. All the souls would be born as men with the power of sensation and love, with pleasure and pain and other feelings attached to them. if they conquered these they would live righteously, otherwise unrighteously. The righteous man, in his appointed time, would return to his native star. If he did not, he would become a woman in the next life and if he persisted in evil, he would continuously be born into some brute form according to the evil nature he has acquired, until reason dominates the animal parts. When the creator had ordained this law, he sent some souls to the earth and some to the moon and then he asked the younger gods to make the moral parts of the souls. The gods made the living beings as the creator had commanded.

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[21] *Phaedo,* 81 b-84 c.

[22] *Meno,* 81 b.

[23] *Republic,* 617-21.

The sensations disturbed the course of the souls. Because of the degeneration of men, who were overcome by the attractions of the senses, the different animals came into existence and the human souls were imprisoned in them according to their wickedness.[24]

*Laws* further explain the relation between the actions and migrations. "And seeing that a soul, in its successive conjunctions first with one body and then with another runs the whole gamut of change through its own action or that of some other soul...[25]" Four as a man's desires tend and as is the soul that conceives them, so and such as a general rule, does every one of us come to be.[26]" If the changes in character are unimportant the souls will move on earth in their migration but if the actions are very wicked they will fall into the under-wold.[27]

## 8. Conclusion

The accounts of transmigration in the Upanishads show man's consolidarity with the universe. With his material part he is united with the whole universe. At the same time they point to the transcendence of man because of the *Ātman* who is completely different from the material world and finite things. Transmigration takes place because of the desire of man for finite happiness and finite things, whether it be human or divine. In effect, the fate of those who are religious according to the Vedic prescriptions does not differ much from the wicked. Both are condemned to endless transmigration. For the sage the blissful life of ten thousand years or more in heaven is nothing, not to speak of earthly joys and prosperity gained through the Vedic religion. These things are finite and there will be an end to them. And again man will always be trying to get something of the same nature. The great intuition behind this theory is that man can never realize himself if he aims at something finite. Only the absolute can liberate man from the finite. Until the light of the absolute destroys his ignorance he will be subject to the delusion of the finite. Only the absolute can liberate man from the finite. Until the light of the absolute destroys his ignorance he will be subject to the delusions of the finite. Of course this idea was not clear in the early theories of transmigration which substituted knowledge for sacrifice and good works and, therefore, might appear to be an attempt to break through the institutionalism and formalism of the degenerating Vedic religion. Another intuition is that good actions have good effects and the bad effects and these will cling to man and will shape his present and future lives. The good which man enjoys or the evil he suffers should be attributed to his actions. The transmigration theory in the Upanishads does not offer adequate explanation about the first birth of the soul. It is the result of the speculation about the present situation of man and the direction human life would take in the next life. Then this theory is applied to the past life of the soul. Though it is not based on solid metaphysical grounds, it however, bears testimony to the belief in the immortality of the soul and that man is responsible for his future life and the good actions will have rewards and bad actions will have punishment. It is an attempt to explain the inequality among men, and the mystery of evil and suffering in the world.

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[24] *Timaeus*, 41 b-44 b.

[25] *Laws*, 903 d.

[26] *Ibid.*, 904 e.

[27] *Ibid.*, 904 d.

What we have said about the Upanishads could also be said about the Platonic theory. The soul has solidarity with the universe because she is the moving principle behind all material things, she is the source of every activity in the universe, though Plato views this as an obstacle to the true goal of the soul. Just as in the Upanishads, man can never be fully satisfied with material realities, he cannot attain his destiny with passing realities. Those who seek apparent realities of the world, though they lead a good life, will not attain the unchanging life in the divine world but be entitled to a good life in this world either as a noble animal or as man. But if a human life is wicked, he will be punished for it by a degrading life as a base brute or as a low class man. Therefore, those who seek finite and apparent good will always be tied to the unchanging eternal ides which one gets by a philosophical life that the soul can acquire its pristine pure state. So both for Plato and the Upanishads the cause of transmigration is the lack of true knowledge of reality and the desire for ephemeral things. For both, the nature of successive births is determined by the actions of man. Therefore, man is responsible for his future life. Plato clearly asserts the pre-existence of the soul. As in the Upanishads, the union with the body is unnatural and true state of the soul is to be without the body. Plato is not quite sure about the cause of this union: it may be due to sin or it may be natural development. Any way the cause of transmigration is ignorance for Plato as well as for the Upanishads. In both, the emphasis of the theory is on the liberation of man rather than on explaining the present predicament of man.

Did the Upanishads influence the theory of Plato? Some say he was influence. He was acquainted with Egyptian and Pythagorean ideas. Transmigration theory is ascribed to Pythagoras, who got it from Egypt, which had been under Persian influence around the 6th century BCE.[28] This hypothesis refuted by others. In the ancient period, it was found among the Celts and the Egyptians besides the Greeks and the Indians. The belief exists today among the primitive tribes in W. Africa, S. Africa, Central Australia and sporadically among the Indians of North and South Americas.[29] Therefore, the Upanishadic and Platonic theory of transmigration could be a philosophic development of a primitive belief of transmigration. The resemblance of children to their parents, the dream experiences of man, reflection on the activities of the soul, the problem of evil and suffering in the world might have contributed to the formulation of this theory in ancient India and ancient Greece. Whatever be the reasons for this theory, it reveals the basic intuition that the soul is immortal and spiritual and it can realize itself fully and forever by attaining the unlimited, and if the soul fails to attain its goal, it has only itself to blame for its failure.

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[28] *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* Vol.12. p.431.

[29] *Ibid..* Vo.12, pp.462-30.

# SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE INDIAN VEDANTISTS ON MYSTICISM, SALVATION AND HEAVENLY EXISTENCE

**Gopal Stavig**♦

The purpose of this essay is to compare the Christian philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) with the religious doctrines of the Indian Vedantists. For each separate topic, the opening statement is made by Thomas Aquinas, followed by the teachings of the traditional Vedantists Shankara (688/788-720/820), Ramanuja (1017-1137) and Jiva Goswami (d. 1566), and the modern Neo-Vedantists Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), Swami Abhedananda (1866-1939) and Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950).[1]

## 1. Mystical Contemplation

**Thomas Aquinas**: Contemplative life is concerned with the love and desire for God, which moves the human intellect towards Him. The greatest happiness is experienced in a deep contemplation of God, which is the goal of human existence. A spiritual vision of the divine essence accompanied by the knowledge and love of God is the supreme good. The closer a person is to the first cause, the more he/she participates in its influence and the more supernatural truths are revealed to him/her. In this world few people receive knowledge of God resulting from a direct vision. Religious contemplation is concerned with the love of God and benefits the intellect which is superior to the five senses. Being directed to the excellence of inner life, it is more meritorious than the active life. Contemplation is long lasting as it focuses on unchanging things and has no contraries that oppose it. Due to the excellence of the object that is being contemplated, it is in the form of most joyous reflection. These

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[1] This article is a continuation of Gopal Stavig's, "A Western Saints (Thomas Aquinas) Dialogue With Some Indian Theologians", *Journal of Dharma,* 25 (2000), pp.60-85, which compared the ideas of Thomas Aquinas with the leading Indian theologians concerning God's essential and operational attributes, the proofs for the existence of God, and the divine creative activity. See also, G. Stavig, "Thomas Aquinas on the Nonduality of God", *Vedanta Kesari,* 88 (2001), pp. 71-73, 112-14.

benefits unlike those of the active life cannot be taken away from a person. Contemplative people are more self-sufficient than the active people, requiring a minimal amount of external support. Spiritual contemplation is an end in-itself than to which all other actions are ordered. It is loved for its own sake and is not directed to some other goal. Spiritual contemplation is directed to divine not human things. It is most desirable since it is instrumental in bringing a person closer to God. Contemplation is the most sublime, because it is desired only by virtuous people and is proper to humans and not animals. The highest perfection is attained by being united to things above the human level not below it.[2]

**Shankara**: Religious devotion involves directing the current of the mind to flow constantly towards Brahman (God). The mental faculties of thinking, feeling and willing are each absorbed in divine consciousness, like the attraction of iron-filing to a magnet or river to an ocean. Supersenuous transcendental consciousness is open to all, but realized by only a few. Spiritual intuition *(anubhava)* is a direct immediate revelation of the higher reality in a state of self-enlightenment. An awakened soul passes into the ultimate state of illumination where the mind is completely absorbed in Brahman which is pure consciousness, and unlimited bliss is attained. Self-revealing, spiritual intuition carries the highest degree of certitude that verifies the statements of the religious scriptures.[3]

**Jiva Goswami**: The highest state of God realization, is attained by love and devotion *(bhakti)* to the Lord and not from knowledge of the scriptures *(jñāna)* or from good works *(karma).* Scriptural knowledge and meritorious works are efficacious only if they are accompanied by devotion. When love of the Lord is consummated, it is easy to control the passions, destroy egotism, attain liberation and experience God consciousness. *Bhakti yoga* is the easiest and quickest path to God and is suitable for all people at all times. Religious ceremonies and ritual are performed only for the purpose of arousing love and devotion, which brings about the realization of the inner nature of the Lord.[4] The basic characteristics of pure devotion are that it: involves a yearning for God and a desire to be favorable to Him; is not attained by logical reasoning; fills the mind with joy because of its intrinsic divine bliss; functions independent of the desire for all other objects being an end in-itself; manifests in a pure virtuous mind destroying all vices; and it leads to the loving service of God.[5]

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[2] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica,* tr. Daniel Sullivan, in *Great Books of the Western World* (Vol. 20), ed. Mortimer Adler (Chicago: William Benton, Inc., 1952), ST, II-II, 180: 4-5, 7-8; 181-4; 182:1-2; Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Hereafter CG), tr. Vernon Bourke (5 Vols; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Pres 1975), CG, III, 37-38.

[3] S. Radhakrishna, *Indian Philosophy,* 2 Vols., (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), II, pp. 510-14; Ram Lal Singh, *An Inquiry, Concerning Reason in Kant and Samkara,* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1978), pp. 152-56; Gopal Stavig, "The Supreme Atman of Shankara's Advaita and the Absolute Essence in the Philosophy of Ibn al-'Arabi," *Journal of Dharma,* 23 (1998), pp.322-24; Gopal Stavig, "Shankara, Kant and Schopenhauer," *Darshana International* 39 (1999), pp. 24-25.

**Swami Vivekananda**: Devotion to the Lord *(bhakti)*, which is a manifestation of bliss, involves intense selfless love of God, and is not reducible to any earthly benefit. It is love for love's sake, an end in-itself, which brings eternal satisfaction. All thoughts, words and deeds are surrendered to the Lord and the least forgetfulness of God makes the devotee feel intensely unhappy. Filled with spiritual bliss, the devotee finds pleasure only in the company of God, who is his only refuge. To see, feel and enjoy the Lord is the easiest and the most natural path to the Divine. Direct super conscious contemplation *(samādhi)* which is the goal of religion, is an immediate perception, a constant remembrance of God in the soul. Transcending the limitations of the five senses and the power of reasoning the soul is united with God.[6]

**Swami Abhedananda**: Spiritual realization is the direct and immediate awareness of a person's true inner nature, beyond intellectual understanding and sense perception. Holiness is the result of direct consciousness of our own spirituality, an internal communion with the heavenly realm. First attain to spiritual realization and then philosophical ideas will fall into place and all doubts will be removed. Spiritual love which his latent in each soul, leads to pure happiness, and to the end to all sorrows, selfish attachments and worldly cravings. Selfless love of God seeks no material return, is accompanied by non-attachment to worldly pleasures, is fearless, accepts all life events as being under the control of the divine will, purifies and humbles a person, and leads to the ecstatic super conscious state of existence.[7]

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[4] Sudhindra Chakravarti, *Philosophical Foundation of Bengal Vaishnavism*, (Calcutta: Academic Publishers, 1969), pp. 73, 172-76; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 Vols., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1988) iv, pp.415-18.

[5] Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Philosophy*, 3 Vols., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), II, pp. 362-63; Chakravarti (1969), pp. 185-86.

[6] Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (hereafter CW), ed., Advaita Ashrama, 9 Vols., (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1962), III, 31-36, vi, 150-54; VII, pp. 82-84.

**Sri Aurobindo**: The illumined mind functions by vision and not by reasoning. The reasoning process operates slowly in a piecemeal fashion, but a vision yields sudden and direct insight. Reasoning creates a representative image of truth, while the higher mind catches the substance of the truth. In the intuitive process, when the consciousness of the subject and object meets, the yogi feels and vibrates with the knowledge of that ensues from this encounter.[8] "Intuition has a fourfold power. A power of revelatory truth-seeing, a power of inspiration or truth-hearing, a power of truth-touch or immediate seizing of significance ... a power of true and automatic discrimination of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth."[9]

**Thomas Aquinas**: It is wise to pray to the deceased saints, particularly if a person is attracted to them, since the effect of prayer depends in part on a person's level of devotion. The prayer of the saints "are always granted, since they will only what God wills ... and what God wills is always fulfilled."[10] Pray asking for things that are conducive to bring salvation, since the kingdom of God is to be sought first and temporal goods secondly.[11]

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[7] Swami Abhedananda, *Human Affection and Divine Love,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1978A), pp. 24-37; Swami Abhedananda, *Yoga Psychology,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1960), pp. 137-38, 247.

[8] Basant Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy,* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989), p.200.

[9] Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine,* (New York: Greystone Press, 1949), p.843.

[10] Aquinas (1952), ST, Sup III, 72:2.

**Swami Vivekananda**: One should pray to the saints and angels who have the power to help an individual in their spiritual quest. In the highest devotion to God there can be no petition for material prosperity.[12]

**Thomas Aquinas**: Religious images are physical objects used as signs of the spiritual reality, which help to unite a person with God. First worship God through external images, then internally through the intellect and finally contemplate the essence of God. "The worship of religion is paid to images, not as considered in themselves, nor as things, but as images leading us to God incarnate. Now movement to an image as image does not stop at the image, but goes on to the thing it represents."[13] Corporeal and sensible religious images are physical objects that are signs of the higher spiritual reality, used for the purpose of uniting the soul with God. Most humans can apply themselves to material images but not to spiritual things without a veil."[14]

**Swami Vivekananda**: All religions utilize external physical images to represent the Divine. It is necessary to have concrete symbols to worship the abstract, since we cannot think of a thing without a mental image in the mind. Religious images help to keep the mind fixed on God. "All these are material images, and so long as you cannot conceive of the abstract as abstract, of the ideal as the ideal, you will have to resort to these forms, these material images."[15] Physical images are like the words of the scriptures, which are vehicles through which God communicates himself and is worshiped. The subjective state is reached through the objective. Some people prefer mental images in their mind and others require physical images of the divine. Ritual is concretized philosophy that helps a person realize abstract ideas though a material symbol. By the law of association religious images call up ideas of holiness, purity, truth and omnipresence in the mind of the spiritual aspirant. Therefore, worship of images can produce the highest lives of spirituality, morality and love. Through images one can realize their own divine nature and grasp the higher spiritual truths. Always worship God in the image or picture, not God as the image or picture. Worship of religious images for procuring material benefits is a form of idolatry that produces karmic fruits, but does not bring about the love of God or liberation.[16]

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[11] *Ibid.,* ST, Sup III, 72: St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica,* ed. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 22 Vols., (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1922), ST, II-II, 83: 4-5, 11.

[12] CW, I, PP. 379-80; IV, p. 38.

[13] Aquinas (1922), ST, II-II, 81.3.

[14] *Ibid.*, ST, Ii-II, 175.3:, Aquinas (1952), ST, III, 61:1.

[15] CW, II, p. 40.

**Swami Abhedananda**: Religious images are symbols utilized as aid in the development of devotion to and concentration on God. A religious picture, a statue, or a symbol like the Hindu Om or the Christian Cross, are each representations of the Supreme Being. In order to concentrate the mind on abstract ideals, concrete forms and symbols are used. All religious words, art and music are symbols of a corresponding idea or thought. It is impossible to worship or pray to an unknown God except through the use of these symbols. "All religions and all philosophies are but the symbols of the divine principle, the embodiment of abstract thoughts clothed with the garment of poetic language."[17] God is infinitely greater than the worshiper's grandest conception of him. In order to concentrate or meditate on the Lord the person will have to begin with an imperfect concrete or mental symbol like a picture, image, word or any other religious emblem. Through image and symbolic worship the devotees can raise their mind up to a higher level.[18]

**Thomas Aquinas**: Religious devotion is "the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God ... devotion is an act of the will whereby a man offers himself for the service of God who is the last end."[19] Devotion involves the surrender of the will to God which yields joy. The sanctified and purified will, dedicates itself to God and devotes itself to his service.[20]

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[16] CW, I, PP. 16-18, 72; II, pp. 39-40; IV, pp. 36, 45-47.

[17] Swami Abhedananda, *Path of Realization,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1946), p. 94.

[18] Abhedananda (1946), p. 92-97; Swami Abhedananda, *Philosophy and Religion,* (Calcutta: Ramkrishan Vedanda Math, 1951), pp. 40-44.

[19] Aquinas (1922), ST, II-II, 82:1.

**Ramanuja**: The goal of direct contact with the divine is complete resignation to the will of God. Self-surrender *(prapatti)* opens the devotee up to God's mercy and power, which reveals itself to the religious aspirant. Self-surrender requires that the aspirant lives in conformity with God's wishes and develops firm faith in God's protection, a feeling of absolute dependence and an attitude of self-resignation.[21]

**Swami Abhedananda**: Surrender oneself to God's universal will. A person should welcome whole heartedly everything that comes to him/her, pleasant or unpleasant, realizing that it is the Lord's will. Absolute self-surrender removes all fear.[22]

**Thomas Aquinas**: To be fruitful, the contemplative life requires that the person practice intellectual and moral virtues like truthfulness. The purpose of moral activity is to effectively direct a person to his/her final end which is the contemplation of the eternal truths. Moral virtues and good works are predispositions for the contemplative life, which help to control the passions that direct the mind to sensible things. Religious virtues are necessary since they are an aid in attaining salvation which is the final goal of life. God is good, so to some extent we become like him by performing virtuous deeds.[23]

**Shankara**: Meditators must maintain high moral standards and follow the scriptural injunctions. Good deeds and moral behaviour purify the heart and help an individual to free themselves of past sins. Morality is the law of the higher self, which is necessary for attaining the supreme good. Moral actions aid a person in realizing God, and bad actions are what retard the progress toward this goal. It is not possible for a realized soul to sin or perform any evil acts, since they have transcended all selfish attachments.[24]

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[20] *Ibid,,*.ST, II-II, 82:1.

[21] Krishna Bharadwaj, *The Philosophy of Ramanuja,* (New Delhi: Sir Shankara Lall Charitable Trust Society, 1958), pp. 198-204.

[22] Abhedananda (1978A), pp. 32-33.

[23] Aquinas (1952), ST, II-II, 180.2; I, 103:4.

**Sri Aurobindo**: The ultimate end of good works and the moral life is God-realization, becoming a spiritual being. Virtue is that which helps us express our divinity and awakens the religious spirit in a person, and evil is that which retards the progress toward perfection, truth and happiness. Duties may be performed as obedience to the Divine Will or for expressing our innate divinity. Morality is the law of our essential spiritual nature. It is not based on material and utilitarian consequences, but on the inner spiritual evolutionary growth of the individual consciousness.[25]

**Thomas Aquinas**: Ultimate happiness is not found in any created thing, but only in contemplating God, the supreme universal good, the end of all things. "The higher our mind is elevated to the contemplation of spiritual beings, the more it is withdrawn from sensible things ... the mind which sees the divine substance must be completely cut off from the bodily senses, either by death or by ecstasy."[26] An inordinate love of a temporal good like wealth or sensual pleasure may lead to the renunciation or loss of a spiritual good.[27]

**Shankara**: The experience of Brahman is the only object that can give a person permanent joy and peace. There is unlimited happiness in the transcendental realm compared to the limited happiness of mundane pleasures. Renunciation of all desires of enjoying the fruits of one's actions is a necessary prerequisite for realizing Brahman.[28]

**Swami Vivekananda**: All great souls reject sense pleasures and enjoyment, since God cannot be realized through a comfortable and easy life. Renounce the lower joys for the higher. To realize the truth a yogi must go beyond the limits of the five senses and rise above external and internal nature.[29]

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[24] Shankara, *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination,* ed., Swami Prabhavananda (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1947), pp. 41, 53, 60-61; Radhakrishnan (1992), II, pp. 462-63, 613-14, 620; Stavig (1999), p. 26.

[25] Ram Sharma, "Moral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo", *Darshana,* 9 (1969), pp. 19-25.

[26] CG, III, 47.

[27] Aquinas (1945), ST, I-II, 78:1.

[28] Shankara (1947), pp. 52-54, 60-61; Radhakrishnan (1992), II, pp. 612-14.

**Swami Abhedananda**: Seeking sense pleasures, the persons become slave to them. To fulfill the desire one may have to use violent and dishonest methods, in order to acquire the sought after object. Sensual happiness is short-lived and it depends more on the mental and physical condition of the enjoyer than on the object itself. Utilizing the faculty of right discrimination, a religious devotee should be readily able to renounce whatever does not aid him/her in realizing the truth.[30]

**Thomas Aquinas**: The intellect precedes volition because a person cannot will what they do not understand. First, the good is known through the intellect, then it is willed. Understanding of the supernatural end is essential in order that a person should direct himself/herself rightly to God. Wisdom is the directing of reason toward the eternal and incorporeal supersensible reality which the good, true and beautiful. Moral virtue entails making a choice and therefore requires prudence and understanding. The object and substance of wisdom constitutes the superior reason, which differs from empirical knowledge which is an inferior form of reason. Supernatural wisdom is not an intellectual view of reality, but a participation in God, a communion between the process of knowing and the Divine. It is realized through love of God by directing all acts to the supreme good.[31]

**Shankara**: Higher knowledge *(parā vidyā)* helps the seeker to attain illumined knowledge of the truth and direct realization of Brahman. God is realized by discriminating between the real and the unreal, between spirit and matter. It is the wisdom gained through meditation. Lower empirical and intellectual knowledge *(aparā vidyā)* which deals with the natural world, eventually leads a person to the higher wisdom.[32]

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[29] CW, II, pp. 36-37; IV,pp. 242-43.

[30] Swami Abhedananda, *Spiritual Unfoldment,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, *1955A),* pp. 16-18, 24-25.

[31] CG, II, 25-26; Aquinas (1945), ST, I, 82:3; I-II, 58:4.

[32] Radhakrishnan (1992), II, pp. 518-20.

**Swami Vivekananda**: There is no willing without knowing, since we cannot desire something unless we first know the object. There is a higher knowledge by which Brahman is known, which differs from the lower secular knowledge. Direct perception of God which is beyond the circle of the senses and the intellect, does not contradict reason or human experience and is verifiable by spiritual experience. Spiritual realization is not attained through intellectual doctrines, but is the outcome of mystical experience. It is a process of being and becoming, not of known and knowing. See God and then all religious doubts will cease. True religion is based on the direct perception of spiritual facts, while reason is of secondary value, being useful to compare one fact with another.[33]

**Swami Abhedananda:** *Jñāna Yoga* is the philosophical path of wisdom, the path of discriminative knowledge. Right discrimination and proper analysis are indispensable for acquiring the knowledge of the higher reality. A knower of Brahman is liberated by the spiritual knowledge of the Atman (the Transcendental Self), which involves discrimination between the lower and the higher Self.[34]

## 2. Salvation and Liberation

**Thomas Aquinas**: The vision of God is partially attainable in this life and perfectly attainable in the next life when a person has a direct intellectual vision of God as he is in Himself. A created likeness is not the vision of God's essence. What is seen is a figure representing God, since He cannot be known through the five senses. "Our soul, as long as we live in this life, has its being in corporeal matter; hence it knows naturally only that what has a form in matter, or what can be known by such form … the divine essence cannot be known through the nature of material things."[35]

**Shankara**: A knower of Brahman is liberated while living in a physical body *(jīvanmukti),* enjoying the constant bliss of the Atman.

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[33] CW, I, PP. 13, 181-83, 232-33, 415-16; Ii, pp. 61, 162-63.

[34] Swami Abhedananda, *How to be a Yogi,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1955B), pp. 120-25.

[35] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, tr. Anton Pegis (2 vols., New York: Random House, 1945), ST, I, 12:11; See also, Aquinas (1952), ST, II-II, 180-5.

Human life for the enlightened sages continues after liberation, analogous to the potter's wheel that continues to revolve even after the vessel has been completed. After the residual karmas are exhausted, the body of liberated person dies and attains the ultimate state, never to return to the world. The soul realizes its true nature becoming what it already is in reality.[36]

**Ramanuja**: Liberation on earth is only a partial state, since complete emancipation requires total dissociation from the sense organs and the physical body. Ultimate liberation *(videhamukti)* is attained in the afterlife state when the liberated soul becomes free from the limitations of the physical body and enjoys the perpetual bliss of communion with the Lord.[37]

**Thomas Aquinas**: According to Mt. 25:46 evil people "shall go into everlasting punishment." Following the principle of divine justice, a temporal merit produces an eternal reward in heaven and temporal sin produces an everlasting punishment. This is because a person who sins mortally against God deserves an infinite punishment.[38] In spite of these statements, Thomas Aquinas wrote the following passages which could be used to defend the doctrine of universal salvation and liberation. "It is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should produce things without giving them their perfection. Now a thing's ultimate perfection consists in the attainment of its end. Therefore, it pertains to the Divine goodness to lead things to their end."[39] "That which is the highest good, is from the highest point of view, the end of all things … all things are ordered to one good as their end, and this is God ... God is obviously the end of all things … the supreme agent moves all secondary agents, so must all the ends of secondary agents be ordered to the end of the supreme agent … all things are ordered to God as an end."[40] "The ultimate end of things is to become like God … So, all things tend through their movements and actions toward the divine likeness, as toward their ultimate end."[41] "All creatures … are ordered to God as their ultimate end, and achieve this end to the extent that they participate somewhat in His likeness … So, each thing intends, as its ultimate end, to be united with God as closely as is possible."[42] "All things are subject to His providence … The end towards which created things are directed by God is twofold: one end is life eternal, consisting in the vision of God."[43] "All things are ordered to divine goodness as an end … God makes all things for an end which is Himself."[44]

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[36] Shankara, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, tr. Swami Gambhirananda, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1996), Section, 4:1.15; Radhakrishnan (1992), Ii, p. 645.

[37] Ramanuja, *The Vedanta Sutras*, ed. George Thibaut (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), Section 1.1.4., pp. 186-89.

[38] Aquinas (1952), ST, Sup III, 99:1-2.

[39] Ibid., ST. I, 103:1.

[40] CG, III, 17.

**Shankara**: Since the Atman is a person's true essential nature, all people will eventually be liberated *(sarvamukti)* and realize their own true Self (Atman). No one is barred from this enlightenment, since all people sooner or later would listen to the call of the infinite God who resides within their heart. The process of reincarnation provides multiple lives to reach the goal.[45]

**Swami Abhedananda**: The punishments resulting from the law of *karma* are temporal and proportional to the magnitude of the act. There is no eternal punishment since all human actions produce limited effects that are eventually worn out. In time all people will be saved through the natural process of evolution, and will become perfect.[46]

**Sri Aurobindo**: Human existence "is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the being which moves towards the revelation of a supreme spiritual light and power and joy and oneness." There is "a progressive development of our consciousness towards a supreme recovery of unity with God."[47] The directing and creative force behind evolution is the transcendental God manifesting in the world of becoming. Human existence entails the evolutionary unfolding of a person's innate potentialities, progressing towards the attainment of a supreme spiritual power, joy and unity. Personal evolution is accelerated by divine grace. There is an urge in all souls to perfect themselves by the power of the spirit. Evolution is teleological based on spiritual evolution of consciousness that takes us to the heavenly realm, transforming the lower into the higher and ending in the realization of God for all people.[48]

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[41] CG, III, 19.

[42] CG, III. 25.

[43] Aquinas (1945), ST, I, 23:1.

[44] CG, III, 64.

[45] Shankara (1996), Section 1:3.19; Radhakrishnan (1992), pp. 636-37, 642.

[46] Swami Abhedananda, *Life Beyond Death,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1984), pp. 109-10; Swami Abhedananda, *Attitude of Vedanta Towards Religion,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1990), p. 29.

**Thomas Aquinas**: In every object of desire, it is really God that is desired. "All things desire God as their end in desiring any particular good … for nothing is good and desirable except inasmuch as it participates in the likeness of God."[49] All actions are performed to achieve a limited good, which in turn is limited participation in divine goodness. Finite entities cannot fully satisfy any intellectual desire. The intellect desires more than to know created substance and seeks the understanding of infinite substance. A seeker is not satisfied with knowing the substance of the effect, but desires to know the substance of the cause which is God. The desire to know the truth does not ultimately rest until it reaches God.[50]

**Swami Vivekananda**: All existence is struggling unconsciously to reach the divine realm, each following their own course leading to God at the centre. Everyone is working toward the same spiritual goal, consciously or unconsciously and all people eventually will be liberated and none will be lost. All humanity is motivated by a struggle for infinite power and pleasure, but most people mistakenly try to reach it through the sense.[51]

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[47] Sri Aurobindo (1949), pp. 606, 674.

[48] Rama S. Srivastava, *Sri Aurobindo and The Theories of Evolution,* (Varanasi; Chowkhamab Sanskrit Series Office, 1968), pp. 305-06, 326-27.

[49] Aquinas (1945), ST, I, 44:4; R.V. De Smet "Sankara and Aquinas on Liberation," *Indian Philosophical Annual,* 5 (1969), pp. 241-45.

[50] CG, III, 50.

[51] CW, II, pp. 62, 383.

**Sri Aurobindo**: These lower principles are expressions in varying degrees of the higher reality. The process of evolution is necessary to reach ultimate reality. There is an inborn urge in all worldly souls to perfect themselves by the power of spirit.[52]

**Thomas Aquinas**: All creatures are images of exemplary forms in the Divine mind, but only humans are made in the likeness of God. "In man there is some likeness to God, copied from God as an exemplar; yet this likeness is not one of equality, for such an exemplar infinitely excels its copy".[53] Wherever the image of God exists there is also an imperfect likeness, something copied from something else. The human mind which is a mirror that reflects the likeness of God in a closer way than lower creatures do. The image of God is impressed on the mind, like the image of a king on a coin or a reflection on glass. Rational creatures are image of the Trinity possessing its characteristics to varying degrees. Life's goal is to assimilate oneself to God, to become as similar to God as possible, by participating in His intellect, goodness and love. Jesus Christ took on the image of man, so that humans could become like God. Everything is good in so far as it manifests the image of God by participating in the likeness of God which is its final end. The more enhanced the likeness of God, the more we participate in His being and the higher is our ontological status.[54] God loves all things, for in so far as they exist they are good and willed by God. "Nothing can be evil in its very essence … every being, as such is good, and that evil can exist only in good as its subject … every evil is caused by good … evil can be only an accidental cause, and thus it cannot be the first cause, for the accidental cause is subsequent to an essential cause."[55] All creatures including human beings preexist in a timeless eternity, in God, the first cause of all things. "Although creatures have not existed from eternity, except in God, yet because they have been in Him from eternity, God has known them eternally in their proper natures."[56]

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[52] S.K. Maitra, *The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1968), p. 419.

[53] Aquinas (1945), ST, I, 93:1.

[54] *Ibid.*, (1945), ST, I, 93.

[55] *Ibid.*, (1945), ST, I, 93. See also: ST, I, 20.2.

[56] *Ibid.*, (1945), ST, I, 20:2.

All people exist more truly as an intelligible being in the mind of God, than as a corporeal being in a human body. "Natural things have a truer being absolutely in the divine mind than in themselves, because in that mind they have an uncreated being, but in themselves a created being ... a house has nobler being in the architect's mind than in matter."[57]

**Shankara**: Atman is the prototype *(bimba)* which shines on the surface of *avidyā/māyā* or the intellect *(buddhi)*, producing the reflected *(pratibimba)* individual self *(jivīa)* and the world. The image of God is the perfect reflection of the Atman the Transcendental Self, on the empirical self in the relative world. An injury to a reflection does not injure the original, unlike a part-whole relationship.[58]

**Ramanuja**: Souls are images of God, in the sense that they are parts and modes of Brahman the infinite God. In essence the soul is one with God, being eternal, omniscient and blissful; but as a mode it is different. Human bodies are each a part of God's universal body. God is present in the internal spirit *(antaryāmin)* within the heart. Spiritual progress involves the realization that we are modes of Brahman always under His control. In time the soul realizes its likeness to God and is no longer bound by universal ignorance *(avidyā)* and its own karmic limitations.[59]

**Swami Vivekananda**: The universe is a projection of God, the universal Intelligence. Our soul is part of God, who is the eye of the eye and the mind of the mind. All existence to varying degrees, is an expression of the triad, namely, existence, consciousness and bliss. At the beginning of the creation, the spiritual man (image of God) is involved in seed form within all living beings. Each person is divine by nature, but the purity and holiness of the real person are clouded and veiled by the delusory power of *mayā*. "Each soul is pure and perfect, omnipotent and omniscient ... But, it can manifest itself externally only according to the mind it has got. The mind is, as it were, the reflecting mirror of the soul."[60] Perfection is a person's true nature, since holy qualities are already latent in the soul only they are prevented from manifesting. Potential divinity originally exists in subtle form and is eventually actualized, unfolding as an effect which reveals its natural perfection (likeness of God). Through a long process of evolution the divine man that is involved within a person gradually uncoils itself and manifests on the empirical level of existence. Remove the obstacles, and by its own nature the higher manifestation will express itself. The clear and purified mind reflects more of the soul's perfection, since the mind is the reflecting mirror of the soul. Eventually the point is reached when the person is liberated.[61]

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[57] *Ibid.*, (1945), ST, I, 18:4. See also, ST, I, 4:2.

[58] Radhakrishnan (1992), II, p. 607.

[59] Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 350-51, 354; Julius Lipner, *The Faces of Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), pp. 39-40, 44-46, 85-88.

**Swami Abhedananda**: The cosmic mind contains the ideas and concepts of all existence things. The logos is the prototype of the perfect man in the Divine mind. All existence proceeds from the Soul of our soul, the Life of our life, the omnipotent source of existence. "The perfect type of man, which existed in the Divine mind, is eternal and a part of the universal Logos. All human beings, therefore, are more or less imperfect expressions of that ideal man or Logos or the first begotten son of the Divine mind."[62]

All people are attempting to express as perfectly as possible the ideal man that was created by God. A person's soul, and not the imperfect physical body, is created in the image of God. Just as an image is a reflection of the original, so also the soul and ego are an image, reflection or shadow of the one God, the infinite source of all spiritual powers. Due to the limitations of space, time and causation, sacred qualities and power manifest only partially and imperfectly on the material plane of existence. These qualities are latent in the soul of all people, but are expressed only when the barriers are removed. All people, consciously or unconsciously are attempting to manifest that perfect man. Gaining experience in the empirical world, the soul being the image of God, longs for higher manifestation of divinity and eventually realizes its potential divinity (likeness to God).[63]

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[60] CW, VI, p. 21.

[61] CW, I, p. 292; II, pp. 207-11; III, pp. 284, 407; VI, pp. 21-22, 52; ix, p. 535.

[62] Swami Abhedananda, *Divine Heritage of Man,* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1947), p. 182.

## 3. Heavenly Existence

**Thomas Aquinas**: Since humans are created to attain a supernatural end, the ultimate goal of life is the perpetual vision of God, the Absolute good experienced in a state of perfect happiness. Through the beatific vision which is attained by the Lord's grace in the next life, the soul partakes of the highest joy and becomes like God. "Whatever is desirable in whatsoever beatitude, whether true or false, all preexists in a more eminent way in the divine beatitude."[64] The joyful experience of God frees the individual from the burden of sin, ignorance and pain. In the heavenly realm, all desires are completely fulfilled, it being the ultimate state of joy, possession, honour and self-preservation. Seeing the Divine substance, through the vision of the essence of God, the intellect contemplates the genera and species of all things and the plan of the cosmos. Transcending time the intellect comprehends all things at once and not in succession. The soul cannot fall from glory, since the beatific vision of the Divine Being cannot be lost. This is the most covetable state and should be desired intrinsically for its own sake. It is unending since the Divine substance and the beatified intellectual substance are immutable and because no power can oppose God's omnipotence.[65]

**Ramanuja**: All emancipated souls are under the complete control of the Lord. They are in harmony with God and share in His bliss being part of him. Since they are totally associated with God, they participate in His happiness. The liberated soul is similar to God except, it is not able to create, preserve or destroy the world.[66]

**Jiva Goswami**: In the highest heaven one experiences the bliss of being a worshipper of God and of living, moving and having their being in the Supreme Being. They see God in themselves and in all other souls. Liberation means: removal of all the bondage of the natural world; realization of one's true self; attainment of an eternal spiritual state beyond the physical and the subtle realms, free from doubt and unhappiness; direct intuition of the deity; and perpetual worship and service God.[67]

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[63] Abhedananda (1947), pp. 181-87, 202-15; Swami Abhedananda, *The Mystery of Death* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1978B), pp. 113-15; (1960), pp. 369-74.

[64] Aquinas (1945), St, I, 26.4.

[65] CG, III, 59-63; Aquinas (1952), ST, I-II, 3:8; 5.4.

[66] Ramanuja (1966), Sections 4.4.17-22; Dasgupta (1988), IV, pp. 98-99.

**Swami Vivekananda**: After attaining liberation, the soul lives eternally in the highest heaven *(brahmaloka)* possessing many powers, but not the world creating power. The liberated state is characterized by omniscience and bliss without any internal or external dissatisfaction. One is free from the laws of nature and is no longer subject to the process of evolution. This is the state of the highest soul "who has become perfectly unselfish, perfectly purified, who has given up all desires, and who does not want to do anything except worship and love God."[68]

**Thomas Aquinas**: The blessed with their intellect elevated will see God in proportion to the degree of the light of glory *(lumen gloriae)* which they receive. This light is possessed in varying degrees by different people depending on their capacity of reception, since no one can know God perfectly as He really is. Nevertheless, each soul will see Him so perfectly that its bliss is complete and full. After the day of judgment, it is possible that all souls in heaven may become omniscient and know all that God knows.[69]

**Shankara**: For Shankara the liberated state consists in total identity of the individual self with Brahman. The liberated self becomes one with the supreme Being. But he also speaks of a process of gradual liberation *(kramamukti).* First, there is the vision of God, then participation in God and finally absolute identity with God. After living with the Ishvara until the end of the cosmic cycle, the soul attains to union with God by merging with the transpersonal non-dual Brahman.[70]

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[67] Sushil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), p. 389; Jadunantha Sinha, *Jivagoswami's Religion of Devotion and Love,* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan, 1983), pp. 24, 139.

[68] CW, I, p. 398.

[69] CG, III, 58-59, Aquinas (1952), Sup III, 92:1, 3; Aquinas (1945), St, I, 62:9.

**Jiva Goswami**: There are five levels of liberation, each of which is an eternal state not subject to rebirth on earth. In none of these five states does a person experience the full plenitude of bliss and power in its entirety. 1) At the first level the soul resides in an eternal spiritual abode of God. The bondage of the natural world is removed in this spiritual state beyond the physical and the subtle worlds. God and his attendants are worshiped both externally and internally. Through worship and devotion the devotee acquires a resemblance to God *(sālokya).* 2) At the next level, some but not all the sovereignty of God is enjoyed by the soul, while residing in his spiritual abode. For example the person can move at will from one realm to another, but does not possess many of God's supernatural powers. 3) Individuals partially assume the form of Lord, a likeness to the Divine, but not an identity with God *(sārū pya).* 4) The blessed live near the Lord and experience the external vision of God *(sāmipya).* 5) In the most intimate state the soul enters into the spiritual body or union with God experiencing His internal nature. Absorbed in the bliss of God the person experiences, lives, moves and have their being in the Divine essence. The liberated soul sees and hears through Brahman *(sāyūjya).* Dualists do not desire this state since their individual personality will vanish.[71]

**Swami Vivekananda**: There are many lower heavens where people fulfill all kinds of materialistic desires. These planes of existence only increases the number of desires and does not lead to the highest beatitudes. The lower heaven is composed of fine subtle matter and energy *(tanmātras).* In the next sphere mass and energy resemble electricity and are almost inseparable. Above this is the *brahmaloka,* the highest heaven, where there is neither mass nor energy as we know them. There, mass and energy merge into the mind-stuff which is the primal energy. There, the individual soul contemplates the entire universe as the universal Cosmic

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[70] *Ibid.,* Sections 4:3.8-11; 4.4.17, 21-22; Radhakrishnan, *Philosophy,* II, pp. 643-48; Stavig (1998), p. 325.

[71] Sinha (1983), pp. 209-16.

Mind *(mahat).* The liberated state is one of bliss without any internal or external dissatisfaction.[72]

In summary there is fair amount of agreement between the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and the Indian Vedantic philosophers. Hopefully, these findings will be of use in the future to theoreticians interested in constructing a universal religious philosophy that encompasses all religions of the world.

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[72] CW, I, p. 398; II, 269; IV, p. 40; V, pp. 102-03.

# MEETING BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: THE VISION OF SRI AUROBINDO

**Thomas Aykara**[◆]

## 1. Person and perspective

Sri Aurobindo, philosopher and mystic, poet and critic, was one of the most outstanding Indian thinkers of the twentieth century. A many-sided genius of extensive knowledge and intense mystical experience, Aurobindo was greeted already in 1928 by his fellow Indian Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore with the words: 'India will speak through your voice to the world.' And indeed he did speak, offered a magnificent message and proposed an integrated synthesis of the Eastern and the Western world. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), born Indian, brought up British, had throughout his life taught man's spiritual growth and eventual transformation leading to the emergence of a Supermind, a thought surprisingly similar to that proposed by the French scientist-mystic, Teilhard de Chardin. By training they were a classicist and a paleontologist respectively, but their thoughts met and merged to a great extent in their emergent mysticism[1].

Aurobindo's intuitive intellect, combined with his yogic experiences of deep mystical dimensions, was able to produce a number of remarkable works in prose and poetry that will become increasingly relevant to the human predicament in the third millennium. We are at a crucial crossroads of our evolutionary progress, our emerging destiny that we alone can determine. The divergence between knowledge and wisdom has grown increasingly dangerous with every new technological innovation. Human beings have power in abundance; whether then, have the wisdom to use that power for creative rather than destructive purposes is still a crucial question. We all have, in the words of William James, reservoirs of life to draw upon, of which we do not dream. Human attempts at development must be coupled with creative dreams. Though there are encouraging signs that the movement towards integration and world harmony is gathering

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[1] Cf. Thomas Aykara, *Cosmic Consciousness. A Comparative Study on Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo,* Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997.

momentum, there is even more alarming evidence that human folly has by no means exhausted itself. Afghanistan and Kashmir are the latest examples. We must realize that might and material superiority alone cannot bring about human harmony and integral growth. Harmony cannot be created by anybody from outside. It must evolve from within. In this context Aurobindo's synthesis of integral evolution, with his glowing promise of a new leap in the very texture of consciousness, stands as a pathfinder towards brighter dawns of the future, and a prophetic contribution towards the building up of a new humanity.

Both eastern and western thought meaningfully meet in Aurobindo. In his vision evolution and faith are so intimately intertwined in the very depth of reality that every step in the evolution of the universe is progressive growth in consciousness. This encounter, is not in externals but in essentials, and prophetically inspirational. He aims at a real synthesis. Prophetic thinker and profound mystic as he was, Aurobindo was a real discoverer, a discoverer of profound proportion and dimensions of the Spirit. He was a scientist of the Spirit, who laid bare the supernatural level of consciousness, thus opening up an immense realm of spiritual experience. Having attained a perfect silence of the mind, he had no need to think, so he claimed, but only to write down in terms of intellect all that he had discovered and come to know in practicing his integral yoga, His creative discoveries, deeply rooted in his profound mystical experiences of the inner unity of Reality, enabled him to journey in the realms of consciousness leading to an ideal fulfillment of what both the East and the West ardently aspired for. The West naturally aims at a fuller realization of the evolutionary, and cosmic nature of its thoughts But exaggerated intellectualism and a one-sided analytical approach has apparently fragmented its vision, compartmentalized its thought and hampered its inner evolutionary progress. Eastern thought in general and Indian thought in particular is more spiritual in nature and mostly individualistic in its preoccupations. Both have to transcend their cultural limitations and experiential constraints and aim at an evolutionary fulfillment. Sri Aurobindo tried in his own unique way to fulfil this function by concentrating more on two threads of his thought: the question of evolution and the function of integral yoga.

## 2. Evolution Reinterpreted

The fact of evolution is accepted today by all scientists. Their interpretations are evidently different and the evolutionary theory is still developing. The history of evolution is a process of disclosure of reality over millennia, which, however, is still open to the future and which - if human beings do not destroy themselves and their world - will reach further dimensions of reality, but at the same time will come up against new limits to knowledge.[2] Aurobindo accepted the cosmic view of evolution of the West but rejected its mechanical character and tried to replace it by a spiritual evolution. Similarly, he rejected the cyclical view of Indian thought and the individualistic outlook of its theory of evolution and replaced it by the cosmic and personal outlook of the West, Consequently he reinterpreted the theory of evolution and replaced it by a spiritual evolution, an evolution in integration culminating in final convergence. His theory of evolution is based on a fundamental intuition that human beings have an acute sense of aspiration, which manifests itself in the divination of the Godhead. It is an inner impulse towards, an innate search after, a sense of a secret immortality. At the heart of this existential aspiration is the mutable Becoming of the immutable Being, a self-projection of Brahman into the conditions of space and time. He turns the traditionally miserable man into a magnificent mutable becoming of the infinite essence of the Absolute. Man becomes the incarnation of the Logos, the expression of the creative power; the Absolute becomes involved in matter. His deep mystical experiences coupled with his adherence to Hindu Scriptures (*anubhava* and *Śruti*) made him develop a theory of evolution that was essentially spiritual in character. Consequently evolution becomes a spiritual process and a dialectic of descent and ascent. The ultimate driving force and the ground of evolution is the power of the Spirit that is operative in its dynamic infolding and unfolding in matter. That there is no part of Reality which is not in some degree infused with the absolute Spirit, is another basic intuition on which he develops his doctrine of evolution.

## 3. The Encounter Between East and West in Evolution

The idea of evolution is certainly more prominent in western philosophy than in Indian philosophy. Greek philosophy gives it considerable importance. In Aristotle, evolution was more teleological. Plotinus' theory of emanation has some outward similarity with Aurobindo's understanding of Divine involution. The individual souls in Plotinus' thought undoubtedly realize God both as the immanent principle working within and also as the transcendent Source which the individual can reach by a long progression, through a series of stages. But in Aurobindo's thought, both these immanent and transcendent aspects are kept well in mind from the very beginning. Even in the lowest forms of matter, the Absolute is present as an indwelling principle, as in the language of the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular scripture of Hinduism, a dweller within the heart pushing it continually forward. The Absolute is everywhere, writes Aurobindo; it has to be seen and found everywhere. Every finite is an infinite and has to be known and sensed in its intrinsic infiniteness as well as in its surface finite appearance.[3]

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[2] Hans Kung, *Eteranl Life? Life After Death as a Medical, Philsophical and Theological Problem*, New York and London 1985, 223-224.

Aurobindo rejects the *Advaita* (monism) of Sankara, for he asserts unity to the detriment of multiplicity, Ramanuja's *Visistadvaita* (qualified monism) denies the unqualified oneness and unity of the Absolute and Madhva's *Dvaita* (dualism) fails to recognize unity in the multiple. It was to correct and complete these three prominent schools in Indian thought that he developed his theory of integral evolution and integral yoga in which transcendence and immanence meet in human transformation, a gradual spiritual evolution. It is the involution of the Absolute in matter that makes this spiritual evolution inevitable. The appearance of human mind and body on earth marks a crucial step, a decisive change in the course and process of evolution. The human ability to know ourselves is a significant step to the ascent to that perfect self-transparency of the Absolute. Thus Aurobindo sees that there can be a higher status of consciousness than this present one, a state beyond the realm of the mental. The final goal he envisages is a spiritual age, a birth of a new consciousness, an upward revolution of the human being, a descent of the Spirit in our members, a spiritual reorganization of our life.

Drawing inspiration mostly from Greek thought, the West formulated different interpretations of evolution down through the centuries. The Greek mind directed its attention first to the outward, and only at a later stage was it directed inwards. The Indian mind, on the contrary, turned inwards right from the very beginning. The highest reality was always conceived as *Atman* or Self. Consequently the interpretation of the universe was always in terms of consciousness. The progressive disclosures of reality, are in evolving stages of consciousness. The creative evolution of Henri Bergson and the organic and emergent evolution of Whitehead have some striking similarities with Aurobindo: the former two are materialistic in outlook whereas Aurobindo's is spiritualistic in essence. The key to the understanding of the sources and nature of evolution is not to be found in the organic process of nature but is to be sought in the ultimate Reality, the ground and goal of All, incessantly converging to the One.

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[3] Sri Aurobindo, *Synthesis of Yoga,* Centenary Edition Vol. XX, Pondicherry 1972, 375.

Modern humankind with its magnificent achievements and progress is undergoing an evolutionary crisis. We are still only human animals, says Aurobindo.[4] Our central will of life is still situated in our vital and physical being; we are enlightened but not yet transformed. If humankind is to survive, a radical transformation of human nature is necessary. Religions and regulations, teachers and treatises, all these have not succeeded in bringing about this indispensable transformation. They often concentrate more on transcendence at the expense of transformation; an other-worldly transcendence that does not pay sufficient attention to human existential strains and struggles. In spite of their extraordinary achievements, human beings today stand fragmented and frustrated. They have to cease to be mere human animals; they have to begin to be supreme human spirits. It is to achieve this new consciousness or new stage of spiritual being that Aurobindo introduces his discipline of yoga.

## 4. Yoga Made Integral

The synthesis of the inner and the outer, the Teilhardian 'within' and 'without', heaven and earth, One and many, is the central objective of Aurobindo's integral yoga. It is to justify this objective that he repeatedly appeals to the principle of intermediaries. After asserting categorically the essential identity of matter and spirit, Aurobindo establishes the 'law of intermediaries' that is to rule the progressive evolution of the Spirit in matter. Already from time immemorial the Upanishadic teaching said:

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[4] *Ibid.*, 408.

energize the conscious energy in you, for the Energy is Brahman. The eternal spirit is not merely an inhabitant of this bodily mansion, but the very matter is a fit and noble material out of which he weaves constantly his garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of his mansions, for 'matter also is Brahman'. Behind the appearance there is an identity in essence of these two extreme modes of existence, matter and spirit. It is in human consciousness that this reconciliation starts, emerges and achieves its goal of integration and convergence. The extension and emergence of this consciousness, to be satisfying, must necessarily be an inner enlargement from the individual to the cosmic existence. This cosmic existence is the final goal of man in his evolutionary journey in consciousness, of which *Saccidānanda* (Existence - Consciousness - Bliss) is the beginning, the middle and the end, the ground and the goal.

Supermind, a unique concept that Aurobindo introduces as the constitutive bridge between matter and spirit, nature and supernature, is the important medium between the *Saccidānanda* and his external manifestations, the unfolding universe of matter-life-mind. This is, therefore, one eternal and infinite Being, but seven distinguishable terms of Being or the sevenfold cord of Being, as Aurobindo would express it. It is the Supermind that develops the triune principle of existence, consciousness and bliss out of their indivisible unity. Aurobindo's unique interpretation of Supermind as the inherent and incessantly transformative power of *Saccidānanda* plays a key role in his understanding of evolution in terms of stages in consciousness. It is a principle of active will and knowledge superior to mind and creative of the worlds. It is the mediating power and state of being between that self-possession of the One and this flux of the many. Supermind is the vast self-extension of the Brahman that contains and develops. Supermind bridges the gap between reason and mystery, and combines the impersonal Being, personal God and individual self into three inseparable and equally real modes of the supreme Reality. The hierarchical stages of mind leading to Supermind are typically expressed in particular kinds of extraordinary activity - higher mind in synoptic thought, illumined mind in mystical inspiration, intuitive mind in religious genius and overmind in world-transforming action, while Supermind has yet to come down and transform our planet. The rational justification of his integral yoga depends on the doctrine of Supermind whose presence and power he discovers at the very root of man's basic aspiration, His search from the aspiring human-animal leads him to a transparent Supermind who is to be realized in the new consciousness that awaits man. This is the final goal of his journey in human consciousness. Aurobindo made use of the path of integral yoga to realize this goal.

Aurobindo, like the sages of the East, firmly believed that awareness is the door to realization. There is above all the authentic divine dynamism, capable of transforming human nature and creating a new world order. This transformation is made possible through an ascent of consciousness towards the Infinite and final descent of the Infinite into the finite. But human beings are unfortunately wrapped up in manifold ignorance of which they have first of all to become conscious. Awareness of the ignorance that they are in is the beginning of human wisdom and progress. The more we become aware of the limits of our knowledge, the nearer we are to wisdom and true knowledge. The reason and root of our in-built ignorance is our alienation from the divine consciousness. This is overcome only through Yoga, the integral union with the divine. The integral yoga of Aurobindo assimilates the triple paths of Bhagavad Gita and aims at total human transformation, body and soul, an integral and radical transformation. A synthesis of all the yogas implies an integration of all the dimensions of human being, including bodily existence. The human being stands for a complete synthesis, integral fulfilment, and the supra-mental synthesis that indeed fulfils the supreme quest of the human soul.

## 5. The Significance of Aurobindo's Synthesis

Aurobindo's synthesis is intelligible only in the context of his understanding of Reality as One in All and All in One. His creative vision of integrating the interiority and transcendence in human beings as becoming beings is very significant in the East-West encounter. The scientific rigour of the analytical mind in the West has to be coupled with and supported by the testimony of experience as the expressions of the inner Spirit. The entire person with its physical, psychic and spiritual potentialities is in process, a mutual constitutive process of inner encounter between the mutable becoming of the immutable Being. Human beings' power of self-transcendence is the pivot of their further evolution, their attitude of 'unselfing' (in the language of Iris Murdoch). All cultures have countless records of men and women who have displayed these powers in terms of physical, mental and spiritual capacities. This is supported by present-day studies in medical science, physical research, psychological sciences and comparative religious studies. As far as the natural scientists are concerned, writes Hans Kung, the evolution process as such neither includes nor excludes the origin and the goal. But they cannot ignore the basic question of origin, meaning and goal of the whole process. We have to choose between the groundlessness or meaninglessness of Jacques Monod or - on the lines of Manfred Eigen - the primordial ground or primordial meaning of everything.[5] There seems to be a broad agreement emerging that the human nature is undergoing further evolutionary development. Aurobindo's prophetic synthesis becomes extremely significant in the light of humankind's adventurous explorations into the future evolution of human nature.

Aurobindo's integration of matter and spirit, evolution and faith, situated and synchronized at the very heart of human consciousness, and saturated by his mystical experiences, can make a considerable contribution towards the shaping of a more relevant theology. Having long been alienated from the mystical, mythical and cosmic levels of human consciousness, the theologians of the future must open themselves to their depth and power, and integrate their resources into the faith, lived out daily, in which they encounter in concrete form the human consciousness of God. The emergent mysticism of Aurobindo, constitutively integrating unity in diversity, can possibly inspire theologians to create a more open and assimilative theology, especially in the field of theology of religious pluralism. It is by analysing human beings' living and growing consciousness, by reintegrating it into its relational and complementary setting, that the theologians and theologies of the future can make more creative contributions.

## 6. Conclusion

The evolutionary mysticism of Sri Aurobindo is naturally over-optimistic. While constantly concentrating on the encounter between matter and spirit, Aurobindo did not give sufficient attention to the human problem of evil and misery in the world. Though conversant with some schools of psychology, he does not seem to be sufficiently informed of the scientific findings of modern psychological sciences. Perhaps he attached too much importance to his doctrine of Supermind. He was a prophet of the Spirit rather than a scientist of matter. But his integration of matter and Spirit in an emergent consciousness in human beings is a creative contribution towards a meaningful encounter between the Eastern and Western world and a remarkable guide in the march to our destiny. The balance between unity and diversity is the hallmark of his emerging integration realized in the inner encounter. This integration enlightens us on how to escape from the existential estrangements within ourselves and among our fellow human beings, and finally on how to escape estrangement from the Divine.

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[5] Küng, *Eternal Life* (n.2).

It is slightly surprising and significantly interesting to see how a similar mystic of the West, Pierre Teilhard Chardin of France tried to understand and interpret reality in terms of evolution. Integrating matter and spirit; the "within" and the "without" of matter, he experienced the core of inner unity and got his consciousness evolved from bio-sphere to Christosphere. The omnipresent spirit of Aurobindo and the 'divine milieu' of Chardin seem very similar. Both of them developed a theory of evolution centring on the spirit and consciousness. The vision of reality proposed both by Aurobindo and Teilhard de Chardin is basically rooted in their deep personal experiences. In Teilhard too we find a genuine meeting of East and West; while he is more at home in the Christian West, Sri Aurobindo is more inspired by the Hindu East, but both of them have an authentic encounter of East and West.

Perhaps for both of them the innermost aspiration moving dynamically from within us is a perennial source of strength to go forward and an ever-abiding hope that makes human beings look forward to a life beyond. Trust anchored in the permeating presence of the Spirit in us and the hope hidden at the heart of reality is the dynamic source of evolution and the unfailing strength of faith. From a Christian perspective, this in-built trust and the consequent hope will make the risen images of Christ broader and brighter for us, pilgrims on this planet.

# CONSCIOUSNESS INCARNATE: CONCEPT OF BODY IN MERLEAU-PONTY AND RĀMĀNUJA

**Wilson Edattukaran**[♦]

## Introduction

The birth of any philosophy is from man's becoming conscious of his lived experiences. If philosophy is ultimately rooted in experience and consciousness, it evolves in particular contexts and cultures of peoples, always attempting at articulating the manifold layers of man's '*Lebenswelt*'. Philosophers and their philosophies are invariable products of the worlds they lived in, thoughts they shared and traditions they inherited. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Rāmānuja (c.1017-1137), representing two great philosophical traditions are two philosophers who made unique contributions towards a creative and convergent thinking focussing on the body as an Incarnate Consciousness.

Drawing inspiration from the phenomenology and existentialism, Merleau-Ponty developed his own existential phenomenology, delving deeply into the existential derivatives of man being an incarnate consciousness in the world. The wonder of subjectivity exceeds all other wonders, not an abstract and sterile subjectivity, but a subjectivity steeped in actions and saturated by experiences, constantly in an existential encounter with oneself, with other subjects and the world, the home of being and the horizon of horizons. It is an existential subjectivity that stands revealed in an incarnate consciousness and a perceiving body, a constitutive medium that bridges the dimensions and differences of being. At the root of this incarnate consciousness, there is a primordial unity that prepared the ground for an intense interwovenness between man and his world, between man and his fellowmen. The body is not a mere accompaniment, but an existential accomplishment, enhancing the wonder of subjectivity. Subjectivity as proposed by existential phenomenology enhances the deep dialogue dimension of human existence, a dialogue deriving from man's inner unity and wonderful wholeness.

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Śrī Rāmānuja tried to make a synthesis of monism and dualism in and through his doctrine of the world as the embodiment of God. The universe as the body of Brahman is the existential and essential modality of his being. It is the real bridge that links the finite and the infinite, matter and spirit. Thus we find that the concept of the body, though understood very differently and in very different contexts, turns out to be a key concept with some philosophers, both in the West and the East. The incarnate consciousness and ensouled body of Merleau-Ponty have several existential implications and are preceded by rigorous phenomenological analysis. The body as the mode of Brahman in the philosophical analysis of Rāmānuja has more mystical taste and religious traits. However, the concept of the body as developed by both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja, is an original contribution and a creative synthesis of several significant systems of thought that preceded them. Both of them presuppose an ultimate unity at the very heart of reality.

## Consciousness Incarnate: Intervening Impediments

"In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply."[1] While man's attempts at becoming aware of the wonder that he is, centred more on the world outside him in the West, his attempts in the East centred more on the self within. Our attempt becomes all the more challenging when we realize the barriers that separate these two thinkers. Rāmānuja was a religious teacher of the Vaiṣṇava community in South India who, as tradition goes, lived a long life of 120 years in the 11th and 12th centuries, at a time when the Western philosophy was still waiting for the birth of Thomism. While it is irrational to inquire into the awareness of Rāmānuja regarding the 20th century French thinker, there is the possibility that Merleau-Ponty had at least a general idea of the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy and its place in the Indian philosophical system.

In spite of the wide divergence in space and time with regard to their lives, there is something that unites both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja. The human spirit in its search for truth and the underlying 'constant' beneath our everyday experience, tends to converge, in virtue of a universally shared human nature, both in the manner of their thinking and approach to life's meaning and mystery. This germ of concordant discord has fascinated many in the East and West, has awakened their imagination and has changed their worldview and approach to reality. This ultimate unity that exists among the diversities prompted Schelling to write: "The nature is the visible Spirit and the Spirit is the invisible nature."[2] Alfred North Whitehead, while speaking about the relationship between God and the World at the conclusion of *Process and Reality* observes: "... each temporal occasion embodies God, and is embodied in God... the World's nature is a primordial datum for God; and God's nature is a primordial datum for the World."[3] The prologue of the Gospel of St. John, which is the quintessence of Johannine theology of the incarnation in the Christian tradition, points to this basic unity of reality when it says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh..."(John 1:1,14). *Īśa Upaniṣad* begins with such an acknowledgement of unity: "*īśāvāsyam idam sarvam*, God pervades every entity in nature."[4] In the Far East, the foundress of the Tenrikyo religion, Miki Nakayama, writes explicitly in *Ofudesaki*: "This universe is the body of God."[5] The cosmos is the body of God and man is a microcosm. Man is the harmonious blending of all the levels of reality, the most wonderful specimen of the embodiment of the Siprit, consciousness incarnate.

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[1] JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998, §1.

## Consciousness Incarnate: The Existential Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical thinking started, evolved, and became original and stimulating in the fertile soil of phenomenology and existentialism, culminating in his existential phenomenology. He was profoundly conversant with and greatly influenced by the contemporary trends in Western philosophy. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is a genuine synthesis of the best in existentialism and phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty made an in-depth analysis of both German and French phenomenological and existential movements, accepted them critically, and created an original existential phenomenology of his own, digging deeply into the manifold layers and permeating factors of perception.

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[2] SCHELLING, F. W. J., *Works,* Vol. I, Manfred, Schröter (ed.), Munich, 1927-'28, § I, 57.

[3] WHITEHEAD, ALFRED, NORTH, *Process and Reality*, New York: The Free Press, 1979, p.348.

[4] *Īśā Upaniṣad*, 1.

[5] *Ofudesaki*, III:40.

One important contribution, which Merleau-Ponty makes in his analysis, is the nature and function of the body in human perception, relatedness and action. The human consciousness is an embodied consciousness. It is immediately experienced in one's encounter with the world of persons and objects. The body is the locus of attention in all-human engagements. The human body is an ensouled body, a non-objectified and unabstracted body, which is part and parcel of man's pre-objective world. The meaning of the incarnate existence of a person is traced and shaped in the body, in the concrete and concomitant harmony of thought and action.

The human being as an embodiment of consciousness is an indivisible unity in which both body and consciousness interact, meet and merge in such a way that there is no action of the body or consciousness as such, but only of the embodied self. It is the embodiment of the self, as the self is an embodied self. Thus the body as the house of consciousness, is the encountering subject, reveals its projects to other subjects and builds up a world of interpersonal relationships as a wider horizon of its own life activity. The lived body is the unitary agent through the medium of which the reception of the world, others and myself is accomplished. The world is the ultimate horizon of all our experiences, it is the horizon of all horizons. The body is the medium through which I realize myself as a being-in-the-world. The experience of one's body and the perception of one's world are very closely interrelated. The body, thus, is not merely a thing that moves in the world, but that by which consciousness creates human space for the new worlds being conjured up by him everyday.

The centrality of body in human being as an incarnate consciousness leads to another essential dimension of body: the intrinsic interrelationship between the body and the world. The Husserlian clarion call to 'return to the things themselves' finds its echo in Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the return to the world of the lived-experience, the *Lebenswelt.* Man finds his truth in his commitment to the world; his truth is the truth of being-in-the-world.

Human existence is intrinsically intertwined with the world; it is a dialogue with the world. Man, in his encounter with the world, has given birth to meaning. The essence of man is existence in the world; man as a being-in-the-world constitutes his essence. The body allows my being in the world; it involves me and gives me a standpoint in the world. For Merleau-Ponty, man is in the world and the world is in man. As an embodied consciousness, man is in communion with the world and with other embodied selves. It is the body-subject, which knows, which projects, which communicates and brings meaning to the being. The body is the privileged avenue of our entry into the world, through which we act upon the world, and experience the world in a new way. It is the vehicle of the power and process of consciousness in space and time. As an incarnate entity, it is the medium of the presence of a person to the world and to other subjects. Incarnation or embodiment of the human is not to be approached as a problem, which is to be solved by philosophical means; rather, it is a mystery in which we all participate.

The most primordial way in which man finds himself in the world is in his bodily perceptual interaction with it. Perception is a nascent logos, summoning us to the tasks of knowledge and action in a world that has been opened up through our own perception. As a 'nascent logos' perception also lays the foundation for language. Language is not an outer shell of human thought, but is that in which or with which thought originates and breaks forth in expression. The word is the incarnation of thought and in it the thought finds its accomplishment. Speech is not the mere accompaniment of thought, but rather its accomplishment. The engagements and projects of one's body are realized in the encounter with the body of the other which is a factor of one's situation and a part of one's world. This fact of being with the other creates the structures of intersubjectivity, which necessitates communication. In the context of intersubjectivity, the other is encountered as a subject, a non-objectivised presence which enables one to enter into and exist in communion with the other.

Communion necessitates communication of meanings and projects in which the body plays a significant role. Our body is the incarnation of consciousness, its presence in the world, its deployment in space and time. The body exists necessarily here and now. Every instant of movement encompasses the whole span linking together the here and the distant, the present and the future. It is through the body that I act in the world; space and time are not merely a collection of adjacent points which are synthesised by the consciousness and into which my body is brought in. "I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them.... The synthesis of both time and space is a task that always has to be performed afresh."[6] The body has its world, comprehends its world and the bodily experience of movement is its access to the world and its object. The body is essentially an expressive space; it is a mediator of a world. The body is the medium of having a world: responding to the exigencies of existence, it posits a biological world or a cultural world. Bodily experience makes it evident that imposition of meaning is not a function of universal constituting consciousness. My body is the meaningful core and the inherently dynamic bodily spatiality is the primary prerequisite for the coming into being of a meaningful world.

The image of the 'soul as a spectator of its outer shell' or as 'the pilot at the controls' of the ship leads to the idea of a soul which is contingently related to the body. But the body is not something like an object that I can inspect or an instrument, which I can use. I am an embodied vehicle of operative intentionality, an embodied point of view[7]. Our body is neither a mere object, nor an instrument; it is, rather, our Being-in-the-world. It is the privileged point of encounter, the dialectical blend between the subject and the object.

The relation between the body and the soul brings us to the centre of the mystery of man: man is an incarnate spirit; he is not merely a soul using a body. The body is also implied in the accomplishment of the spirit for the soul becomes itself through the body. The body, due to its structuration as a human body, has attained higher levels of integration and, hence, is the living expression of human behaviour and communication to other persons who are also the centres of meaningful communication and encounters. "It is through my body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive 'things'."[8] 'My body is the vehicle of being in the world'; 'I am my body'.[9] The soul does not use the body; rather it realizes itself through the body.[10] The presence of the body to the soul is a "presence to consciousness of its proper history and of the dialectical stages which it has traversed."[11] The essence of the body is to be discovered not in an abstract manner, but in the contingency of existence, in the concrete lived situation. Soul and body are not two external entities or substances; nor can they be regarded as a pure subjectivity transparent to itself and a physical thing. They are integrated in a meaningful structure which does not permit the isolation and separation of the thing and consciousness, matter and form, and body and soul. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is the bearer of a dialectic and the soul realizes itself through the body. This is a constitutive relationship in which body and soul constantly become a realizing integration in which the *Welt* in its *umwelt* and *mitwelt* dimension plays a decisive role, more especially in the intersubjective dimension. Thus, phenomenologically interpreting the existential exigencies of a subjectivity enshrined in the body that man is, Merleau-Ponty made really original contributions to contemporary philosophy.

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[6] MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962, p.140.

[7] MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, *The Primacy of Perception*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, p.16.

## Consciousness Incarnate: The Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja

The Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānuja is better understood when it is situated within the wider spectrum of Indian philosophical scene, and more precisely, in the context of the Advaita and the Dvaita of Śankara and Madhva, respectively. The philosophy of Rāmānuja is called the Viśiṣṭādvaita, qualified non-dualism. Viśiṣṭādvaita is a system of Advaita but qualified by its own characteristic note which makes it different from the pure Advaita, led by Śankara. Brahman is the unchanging *ādhāra* (foundation or ground) of the universe which is Brahman's attribute as his body. With regard to cause and effect, Viśiṣṭādvaita stands for *satkāryavāda* which says that the effect preexists in the cause in a preeminent way and is allowed to evolve in time with name and form. Thus Brahman is both the *nimitta kārana* and the

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[8] MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p.186.

[9] Cf. MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

[10] MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, *The Structure of Behaviour*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963, pp. 202-203.

[11] MERLEAU-PONTY, *Structure of Behaviour*, *op.cit.*,p.208.

*upadāna kārana* (efficient and underlying cause) of the universe. The world, thus conceived and brought to existence, will be called, the body of Brahman.

The definition given by Rāmānuja for *śarīra* has special connotations and implies that the *śarīra* is a reality, which is inseparable from the soul or *ātman*. After a critical analysis of the various definitions given for body in *Śrī Bhāṣya*, Rāmānuja proposes the following definition:

> That substance which, in regard to all things, as can be accomplished by it, is completely (and always) capable of being controlled and supported by an intelligent soul, and which has its essential nature solely subservient unto the glory of that intelligent soul - that (substance) is the body of that (intelligent) soul.[12]

The definition of the body given by Rāmānuja which is pivotal to the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy contains many vital implications. The only substance that has an inseparable relation to the self is the physical body. Consequently, the *śarīra* has to be necessarily inseparable from the soul. In the same way, Brahman, who is modified by the individual soul, has this soul as his body. In the *mahavākya, 'tat tvam asi'*, (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad,* VI.8-15), Rāmānuja traces the essential identity that exists between the Supreme Brahman and the individual self:

> It follows that both words *tat* and *tvam*, coordinated in a *sāmanādhikaraṇya* construction, denote that one Brahman. The word *tat* refers to Brahman as the One who is the cause of the world, the abode of all perfections, the immaculate and the untransmutable One; whereas *tvam* refers to that same Brahman under the aspect of inner ruler of the individual soul as being modified by the embodied soul. So

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[12] *Śrī Bhāṣya* II.1.9. in RANGACHARYA, *Śrī Bhāṣya*, Vol. II, p. 262. In *Vedārthasamgraha,* Rāmānuja enunciates the same idea in the following way: "The relation between soul and body means the relation between substratum and dependent entity incapable of functioning separately, between the transcendent controller and the thing controlled, between principal and accessory. In this relation the one term is called *ātman* or "soul" because this is the one who *obtains* an object since he is in all respects the substratum, the controller and the principal; the other term is called, i.e. *form*, because it is a *modification* that is inseparably connected since it is in all respects a dependent entity, thing controlled and accessory. For such is the relation between the individual soul and its body." *Vedārthasamgraha*, § 76, in BUITENEN, *Vedārthasamgraha*, p. 235.

> it is said that the words *tat* and *tvam* both apply to the same Brahman but under different aspects.[13]

The relationship that exists between the material body and the finite self is the same as that which exists between the finite self and the Supreme Brahman. Thus, for Rāmānuja, "as the individual souls, distinguished by their connection with aggregates of matter bearing the characteristic marks of humanity, divine nature, and so on, constitute the body of the highest Self, and hence are modes of it, the words denoting those individual souls extend in their connotation up to the very highest Self."[14]

It is Brahman who is both the efficient and material cause of Rāmānuja's world. All that came to be has its origin from the Absolute Being. "That from which everything proceeds, in which everything subsists, and to which everything moves, know Him,"[15] says the Upanishad. This is Brahman. He contained everything in Himself in a supremely supereminent way, identified with the simplicity of his own being, and conceived them to be expressed as many, as the text says, "May I become many,"[16] and He allowed them to be. This is the creation theory of Viśiṣtādvaita. Rāmānuja explains this further by making use of a distinction between the causality effected by God as *kārana* Brahman and *kārya* Brahman. *Kārana Brahman* is that all transcendent Brahman who contains all in himself in a supremely transcendent way and thus is to be seen as the efficient cause of what is created. *Kārya Brahman* is the same Brahman, now seen as effected or expressed in the beings of the world which have assumed name and form according to His design. The world thus produced, which includes sentient and non-sentient beings, (*cit* and *acit*), is conceived as an enlarged body of Brahman, of which Brahman is the inner controller. The emerging organic relationship between Brahman and the world is called *śarīra śarīri bhāva*, a relationship between the body and the indwelling inner controller of the body. Because Brahman is the principal and the body, with its all layers of existence, is only an accessory, this is also called, *śeṣa śeṣi bhāva*, a relationship of the principal and the accessory.

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[13] *Vedārthasamgraha*, § 20, in BUITENEN, *Vedārthasamgraha*, 196.

[14] *Śrī Bhāṣya* I.1.1. as in THIBAUT, *Vedanta Sūtras*, 138.

[15] Cf. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, III.1.1.

[16] Cf. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI.2.3.

The entire universe consisting of the *cit* and *acit* are wholly dependent upon Brahman for their existence. The sentient and non-sentient beings are totally controlled by the Supreme Person. He is their Lord and they are supposed to subserve His purpose. Hence, on the basis of Rāmānuja's definition of the body and the theory of the body-soul relation, the entire universe of the finite self and non-intelligent matter stands in a body-soul relation with respect to Brahman. On the other hand, the Supreme Person is regarded as the soul - the *atman* or *śarīrin* - of the entire universe as He is the Ground *(ādhāra)* of the universe, the Controller *(niyanta)* and the self subsistent entity *(śeṣi)* upon whom everything else is dependent. Thus the universe of sentient and non-sentient beings exists in an organic relationship with Brahman and thus there exists a body-soul relationship between them.

Brahman is the soul of the entire universe, the entire universe constitutes His body. The world and the selves, though they are the effects, remain united to him in the soul-body relationship. While the idea of a soul-body relationship between Brahman and the world can be traced already in the *puruṣasūkta* of *Ṛgveda* and is deeply rooted in the Indian tradition, it was indeed the Viśiṣtādvaita of Rāmānuja which provided the philosophical justifications for it. Rāmānuja's Viśiṣtādvaita is a creative synthesis of different traditions of Indian philosophical thinking. His theory of body plays a central role in his philosophy. Body in Rāmānuja becomes an essential modality of Brahman. His interpretation of body safeguards the unity and difference between the individual self and the Brahman. With the help of the theory of causality, his understanding of Brahman as creator, supporter, controller and redeemer brings out well the interwovenness of Brahman and universe in terms of Body. As man stands revealed in his body, so does Brahman stand expressed and extended in his body, which is the universe. Thus in Rāmānuja, the term body has much wider meaning and more religious implications. His doctrine of body is developed, drawing inspiration from religious scriptures, varied religious traditions and opposing philosophical schools. Thus Rāmānuja, critically accepting the previous traditions and creatively synthesizing them, made a significant contribution by explaining the body as the essential mode of Brahman's being.

## Consciousness Incarnate: Converging and Diverging Points

Having seen the conspectus of the thoughts of both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja regarding the reality body, it will be befitting to consider the areas where their thoughts converge and diverge, without prejudice to the real difference between them as heirs of entirely different traditions, as well as men of very original thinking. Both Rāmānuja and Merleau-Ponty are followers of their traditions, but with a critical attitude. Thus for Merleau-Ponty, 'the return to things themselves' was not the same as it was for Husserl. It was rather a return to the world of lived experience. Similarly, the Husserlian intentionality gets a new orientation and meaning in Merleau-Ponty. The preconscious already embedded in the conscious surges to the forefront in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intentionality. In similar way, Rāmānuja's Advaita is different and courageously bids farewell to the then dominant Advaita school of Śankara. This is Viśiṣtādvaita, a new way of interpreting and safeguarding the reality of Brahman and this world.

There is a thrust of synthesis that pervades both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja, though the way this is made is very different. Merleau-Ponty weaves his world of experience centred on the ensouled body, the individualized consciousness. Rāmānuja, on the contrary, sees the last link of the all-pervading synthesis in the absolute consciousness, Brahman which is for him characterized by a world body, containing both sentient and non-sentient beings, all of which are his attributes. They, both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja, stand for a human and divine synthesis, respectively. Correspondingly, the body becomes central to the thinking of both of them. The body is the locus of consciousness for Merleau-Ponty. It is through this human body that man expresses everything and also builds up his living world. It is an ongoing synthesis of space and time. For Rāmānuja, however, the world is the very body of Brahman. For both of them, the body and consciousness, human or divine, exist in an intrinsic interrelationship.

They both agree, but they both differ greatly. The array of differing notes strongly points to one question: What is the ultimate ground of this world, man or God? Merleau-Ponty thinks that this ground must be man himself who is the locus, inspiration and creator of the world. The contemporary hero is man. For Rāmānuja, doubtlessly, Brahman is this ultimate ground. His world, including himself, is grounded on Brahman. Here we must bear in mind that a clear-cut distinction between philosophy and faith is not so much at home to the Indian style of thinking.

Merleau-Ponty as a thinker of the body takes us further into the depth and breadth of meaning that the body unveils. Merleau-Ponty presents the body as if all-pervading. The body is not just a thing in an isolated space. Accordingly, the human being becomes an embodied subject, unique and integral, who is capable of meeting other subjects and communicating with them in a language which emerges from his primordial openness to the other. The human body, he maintains, is inherently a dynamic synthesis of intentionalites. Merleau-Ponty tries to establish our existential roots in corporeality and in the perceptual world. "Intersubjectivity is intercorporeality."[17] Man is an incarnate subject and is constantly in dialogue with an intersubjective world. This intersubjectivity intends a system of "self–others-world"[18] where the world is constituted by the self and the other, yet the world is something more than the sum of the self and the other. Dialogue "expresses the total subject's fundamental way of being in the world."[19]

Relatedness is the central theme, which Merleau-Ponty develops. This is a healthy trend to see how interrelated we are, how each and every action of ours affects others and our universe. For Merleau-Ponty, the earth is "the ground of experience." The reality of our rootedness in the earth is the basis of the interrelatedness that exists among all the creatures of the earth. Such a vision would naturally contribute towards the philosophical grounding for a more existential ecology. Here reason becomes not a tool to subjugate and dominate over nature, but the healthy path to enter the heart of nature. However, Merleau-Ponty's world is limited and it is through and through a human and finite world. Obviously, Merleau-Ponty remains silent about the possibility of an enquiry into a Consciousness, which is neither time-bound nor world-bound. Indeed, our world must be human. But this is not contrary to the fact that it is also divine. The divine dimension of this world is practically left in oblivion by Merleau-Ponty as it is in many other existential philosophers.

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[17] Cf. MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, "Husserl et la notion de Nature (Notes prises au cours de Maurice Merleau-Ponty)," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 70e année, juillet-septembre 1965, no. 3, 257-269, p. 264.

[18] MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *op. cit.*, p.60.

[19] MERLEAU-PONTY, MAURICE, *Sense and Non-Sense*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964. p.108.

A significant contribution of Rāmānuja in the field of philosophy was his defence of reality against the onslaught of a *māyā* theory which denied it. Vehemently attacking Śankara who promoted absolute non-dualism or monism, Rāmānuja renounced the *māyā* theory, the distinction between the absolute Brahman and the personal Brahman, the higher and the lower Brahman and established a personal God as the centre of the soul and of the world. The mutual relationship between Brahman and the world is, then, termed as the principal and accessory, both real, though the accessory is naturally and totally dependent on the principal. While the universe, which is, the expression of Brahman is real and not a mere illusion as the Advaita of Śankara presents it, Brahman is not identical with the universe. While the souls and matter, the modes and expressions of Brahman, are in constant flux and are undergoing modifications, Brahman remains the eternal, changeless single reality. The Supreme Brahman is both transcendent and immanent. Reality is, therefore, neither absolute monism nor dualism, but qualified non-dualism.

## Consciousness Incarnate: Creative Synthesis

Every human being is an embodied consciousness. It is through the body that man gets contextualized and localized. It is through the body that man builds the world. The body is a meeting point of consciousness and matter, *cit* and *acit*. Merleau-Ponty draws our attention to this wonder in the world: embodied consciousness, its creation of the world and its capacity to transcend the world it has created in virtue of its openness to create new worlds. Rāmānuja starts with Brahman who is Absolute consciousness. But this Brahman also ensouls a body of his choice. This body which is cosmic includes all the bodies and spirits in this world and in all possible worlds. In faith, he wants to hold together these two aspects of the Ultimate Reality: an absolute God having the world as his body, in the sense that the world is internally controlled and directed by Him and is totally dependent on and rhythmically moving around him.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja consider body as organic and not mechanical. Consciousness and the body together build up an organism. The entire creativity proceeds from this organic harmony of the body. Merleau-Ponty makes this clear when he says that the body we are dealing with is "an animated living reality". Rāmānuja considers the world body with which Brahman is qualified (*viśiṣta*) animated or ensouled and innerly controlled by Brahman. Merleau-Ponty analyses the body of man whom the traditional Indian philosophy calls the microcosm. Rāmānuja, on the other hand, describes the whole macrocosm as the body of Brahman. Consciousness incarnate is a central theme that is common to both of them. A series of ensoulments, moving from wider to inner circles is seen in the world conceived by both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja.

The body, whether cosmic or personal, is a sacred entity. Indian thinkers have always approached the beauty and greatness of nature with a sense of wonder and awe. This marvellous nature serves as the background of human drama and as scaffolding for divine intervention in history. The *Moksha-dharma-parva* of great Indian epic, *Mahabharata* makes a vivid presentation of this cosmic body of Brahman: "Mountains are his bones, earth is the flesh, sea is the blood, sky is his abdomen. Air is his breath, fire is his splendour, and rivers are nerves. The sun and moon, which are called Agni and Soma, are the eyes of Brahman. The upper part of the sky is his head. The earth is his feet and directions are his hands". As God said to Moses in the Old Testament, the earth on which man is placed is sacred. It demands a basic acceptance of the earth as God's body, and the human being is also part of God's body and hence both sacred. "We do not *have* bodies.... We *are* bodies, "body and soul"[20]. The dignity and divinity of nature and human body is to be preserved and protected since they all form integral constituents of the organic whole, as 'the wine and the branches', the body of God. We are now striving after the reestablishment of the perfect rhythm of the universe, which is the body of Brahman. By discarding the sacredness of the universe, which is the body of Brahman, by boosting our ego, forgetting the divine self abiding therein, we have disintegrated and destroyed the world, neglected and wounded the human individual and finally left out our own divine centre in complete oblivion. The misery of this meaningless vacuum, the agonizing pain of the disorder of this universe is now our predicament. Therefore we suffer. The hue and cry for an eco-spirituality is in reality a cry for the reestablishment of the rhythm and harmony emanating from the innermost centre of this universe. This centre is not a material spot, but a conscious centre of inner control, the ultimate *bindhu (*point) of divine consciousness within the cosmos, which the *Viśiṣtādvaita* understands as God. The innermost spirit abiding within us will characterize our own human consciousness and become our awareness leading to one inner voice and establishing an undisturbed rhythm. In this reestablished rhythm God will be the ultimate centre of all centres of life in the world, in our body and in our soul. The soul, ensouled by God, will be spontaneously related to God who is the one and non-dual (*Advaita*) supreme Being, the *śeṣin*, holding all things together in Him. The soul together with this universe, forming the body of Brahman is the Seṣa surrendered to Brahman, the *śeṣin* and all together they form one reality, the Brahman qualified by his own attributes *cit* and *acit* comprising his world body (*Viśiṣta+advaita*).

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[20] MCFAGUE, SALLIE, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993 p. 14

Both Merleau-Ponty and Rāmānuja are highlighting the different aspects of wholeness within the very human and the Divine. The human world, the historical, is certainly characterized by contingency, which is well emphasized by Merleau-Ponty. In fact, because of this contingency factor of human life, Merleau-Ponty declines to acknowledge a God as absolute transcendence, unrelated to the cosmos. However, the human self contains itself a deeper profundity, in virtue of the very consciousness that has been embodied, which makes it ever seeking and self-transcending. The wonder of subjectivity and the splendour of consciousness, embedded in the body and ever in dialogue with the world, if understood exhaustively, and interpreted with an inner openness, will certainly lead us to new meanings of the Human and the Divine.

# BEING AND LANGUAGE
## Meeting ground for Bhartṛhari and Heidegger

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### INTRODUCTION

Man speaks. It is his speech, language that makes him a distinct being. The fascination for language has lead man, both in the East and West to the philosophical speculation of his capacity to speak. In India speculations on the notion of *Śabda*, speech or language originated in the Vedic times. The Indian seers were interested in the problems of language just as they were pre-occupied with their search for the meaning of the various realities of the universe. Their discussions included many subtle problems related to the origin of a word, different forms of speech, relation of a word to its meaning, speech and its nature, etc. The Vedic *SamhitÒs*, *Brāhmaṇas*, and the *Upaniṣads* as well as *Niruktas* (etymology), the *Prātiśākhyas* (phonology) and the extensive grammatical literature all offer us valuable information about all these problems. This fact, no doubt, points to the keen interest and assiduity of Indian teachers concerning their interest for the study of the phenomena of *Śabda* or *vāk*.

We have great works like Yaska's Nirukata, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, Jaimini's Mīmāmsā and its commentaries of Śabara, Prabhākara, Kumārila, Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* and such other masterpieces about the investigation into the meaning of language. Though, the Indian speculations on *Śabda* were mixed up with religious and spiritual conceptions, they were in no way less rigorous in their scientific and metaphysical discourse on the problem of meaning of the word. The Indian philosophical systems also made many important observations on linguistic problems. Each of the schools of thought had to consider *Śabda* at some stage or other, and they had to ponder over some fundamental questions concerning the relation of the word to reality and the validity of verbal knowledge. Except the Cārvākas, the Vaiśeṣikas and the Buddhists, all other systems of Indian philosophy accept *Śabda* as a distinct source of knowledge.

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Philosophers from the very ancient to the modern and contemporary West are equally concerned with the great capacity of human language. Their speculations on language, theories of meaning and the scientific development of language studies into various branches like syntax, semantics and semiotics - all bear witness to the genuine interest in language studies. Systematic and even mathematically rigorous accounts of language by Gottlob Frege, Betrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and the logical positivists shed much light into the logic and meaning of language phenomenon. The contemporary language philosophers and the ordinary language philosophers like G.E. Moore, J.L. Austin set out to answer the philosophical questions that surround the ordinary language. Further language studies take into account the philosophical problems about the connection between mind, language and the world opening up new vistas for representation, communicative meaning and truth.

We have two representatives from East and West in the persons of Bhartṛhari (c. 450-500)[1] and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) with their thinking on language which culminates in their thinking of Being. For both, the question of Being is essentially interwoven into the experience of the question of language. Hence the thinking of Being is simultaneously a thinking of language; to experience the truth of the one is necessarily to experience the truth of the other. The analysis of Bhartṛhari's understanding of Being along with his thinking on language as well as Heidegger's question of Being in relation to his understanding of language assume the inter-relatedness of the question of Being and language in the philosophies of Bhartṛhari and Heidegger. What is looked for is the independent congruence of the thought content which lay open the hidden truth of the paths taken by thinking from a comparative perspective.

In Bhartṛhari's vision the language we speak is the medium of the self-expression of the ultimate Reality communicated through all meaning-bearing words. It leads us across the external appearance to the core of Reality, which is the source and the underlying unity beneath everything. The Real breaks-forth (*sphuṭ*) through the medium of speech (*Śabda*)[2]. This *Śabda* is not merely a means to a truth or reality but it is the Truth and Reality. In Heidegger's thinking about language the focus moves from the human activity to a source beyond man in Being.[3] Language is the original utterance (*Sage*) which Being speaks to man. Does this mean that Being itself comes to speech in human language? Obviously there is much in Heidegger that hinges on this deep connection that language is alleged to provide between Being and being. It is language that brings Being into expression for both Bhartṛhari and Heidegger.

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[1] Bhartṛhari belongs to the tradition of the great grammarians like P ānini and Patañjali. Bhartṛhari for the first time undertook a thorough study of th e Word-Absolute (*Śabdatattva*) and demonstrated its logical implications. And we get the absolutistic trends of the philosophy of language from his masterpiece the *Vākyapadīya*, which ranks as the principal authoritative work among all Sanskrit works on a philosophy of grammar.

## THE REAL IS *ŚABDATATTVA*

Bhartṛhari conceives Reality as One, which is of the nature of word. The whole phenomenon of material existence is only an appearance (*vivarta*) of this Word-Principle (*Śabdatattva*), which is identical with the ultimate Reality, Brahman. The *Śabdatattva* of Bhartṛhari differs from the Upaniṣadic conception of *Śabdabrahman*. According to the Upaniṣadic vision, there are two Brahmans to•be known: Word Brahman and the Supreme, it is this Supreme Brahman that man reaches when he is proficient in the Word Brahman.[4] Whereas for Bhartṛhari *Śabdatattva* is the Absolute and there is no distinction between the *Śabdabrahman* and the Supreme. The speech essence (*Śabdatattva*) is the ultimate Reality which has neither beginning nor end and is unchanging. Bhartṛhari expounds this view in the very first verse of *Vākyapadīya* thus:

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[2] The term *Śabda* is a very meaningful word. It has a variety of meaning. *Śabda* is generally rendered by terms like word, speech, sound, noise, etc. It also connotes a phoneme, vowel, resonance, language and meaning. *Śabda* in its literal sense stands for a word (*pada*); and etymologically it signifies sound (*dhvani*). Epistemologically *Śabda* refers to the source of knowledge, namely, verbal testimony (*Śabda-pramāṇa*).

[3] The word 'Being,' a basic concept in Heidegger's philosophy, will be written with a capital 'B' in order to distinguish it from the word 'being' which expresses a particular being or 'being' which is the participle of the verb 'to be.' 'Being' will correspond to the German *Sein* and 'being' to the German *Seiendes*.

[4] S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *The Principal Upanisads* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1953), 833. All the references from the *Upanisads* are taken from this edition.

*anādi nidhanam brahma śabdatattvam yad akṣaram /*
*vivartate arthabhāvena prakriyā jagato yatah //*[5]

*Śabdatattva* is of the nature of word and from it are manifested all objects and the whole cosmos. So, this very first *kārikā* of *Vākyapadīya* would mean that the whole phenomenon of material existence is only an appearance (*vivarta*) of the speech principle which is identical with the ultimate Reality, Brahman. The ultimate Reality which Bhartṛhari understands as substance (*dravya*) is the universal in particular things which is nothing other than Brahman as existence. The Real is also called *tattva* (thatness) which is further referred to as *para* (the highest one)[6]. As *tattva,* it neither is nor is not; it is neither one nor differentiated; neither combined nor separated; neither changing nor unchanging.[7] The Absolute transcends all spatial and temporal determinations. Hence diversity and multiplicity could not really be part of the essence of the Absolute. The Real, beyond the reach of the senses cannot be an object of consciousness accompanied with the idea of either existence or non-existence and is therefore beyond being or non-being. From the transcendental point of view, Brahman cannot be a real or unreal cause, for it is ineffable. This means that the entire world of things whose individuality consists only in names and forms (*nāma* and *rūpa*) to use the advaitic terms, has its source in this speech-essence. It does not mean that the *Śabdatattva,* the eternal timeless, is limited by Time. Instead, Time is an inherent power of the Absolute which exerts its influence in bringing about the powers of *Śabdatattva*.

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[5] That beginningless and endless One, the imperishable Brahman of which the essential nature is the Word, which manifests itself into objects and from which is the creation of the Universe. BHARTṚHARI, *Vākyapadīya* Chapter I, tr., K.A.S. IYER (Poona: Deccan College 1965), I. 1. Hereafter VP. I.

[6] BHARTṚHARI, *Vākyapadīya*, Chapter III, Pt. I, tr., K.A.S. IYER (Poona: Deccan college 1971), III.1.20. Hereafter VP. III.

[7] VP. III.2.12.

The eternal timeless appears as changing under the operation of its powers such as Time.[8] Real and unreal are not different entities but real, when not comprehended properly, is believed to be unreal.[9] Hence Bhartṛhari asserts that there exists an ultimate unity, deep-seated within all subjects and objects. The entire manifold universe ultimately and essentially expresses this unity. Both unity and diversity are terms relative to each other and have no individual independent existence of their own. Thus the Reality is non-dual having the nature of word as *Śabdatattva*.

## *ŚABDATATTVA* AS *SPHOṬA*

In Bhartṛhari's view the Absolute Existence itself manifests in the form of words and their meaning. There is no difference between them; Brahman himself is the word. Our speech imperfectly imitates this absolute word. Words that we speak, says Bhartṛhari, come out as an embodiment of thought, which then, is called language. Hence Language, according to Bhartṛhari, not only reveals reality, but it is Reality.

One primary problem faced by Bhartṛhari was how the passing sounds constituting a word could have a single meaning for the listener. He postulated a meaning-bearing symbol called *sphoṭa*, behind the several letters forming a word, or many words making up a sentence. This *sphoṭa* theory, in brief, says that the word essence is the very soul of a meaningful word. It is something that the word reveals or communicates to mind through its meaning. So what is eternal and self-subsistent is not the sound or the word, but the word-essence. The word-essence which is the Absolute for Bhartṛhari appears on the one hand, as the plurality of words and, on the other hand, as the plurality of objects. Hence, the Word-Absolute is ultimately one and undivided. Yet in our empirical experience it appears as divided into sentences, words and phonemes.

Although Bhartṛhari follows the tradition of Grammar School, he develops the *sphoṭa* doctrine probably against the background of the Mīmāmsaka interpretation of *Śabda* and *artha*. According to Mīmāmsakas, since *Vedas* are eternal, the words of which they are composed also have to be eternal. In opposition to this theory of eternalness of the words Bhartṛhari holds that it is the meaning rather than the word that is eternal. All words in his view ultimately mean the Supreme Brahman, which he calls *Śabdatattva*. In order to evince this truth he established the concept of *sphoṭa*. In Bhartṛhari's view *sphoṭa* is an indivisible entity which is the real meaning bearing whole. *Sphoṭa* as a meaning principle works identically everywhere and in everybody's speech.

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[8] VP.I.3.

[9] VP. III.2.7.

Bhartṛhari begins with the treatment of *sphoṭa* which is the conveyor of real meaning from *Vākyapadīya* I.44. He says: "In the words which are expressive the learned discern two elements: one (*sphoṭa*) is the cause of the real word which, the other (*dhvani*), is used to convey the meaning." Thus Bhartṛhari advocates that a word (*Śabda)* has two aspects, namely, the word sound (*dhvani*) and word meaning (*artha*). Although they may appear to be essentially different, they are really identical. What Bhartṛhari emphasizes is the meaning bearing or revelatory function of this two sided unity, the *sphoṭa*, which he maintains is eternal and given in nature. The apparent difference is seen to result from the various external manifestations of the single internal *sphoṭa*.

The real expressive word, the indivisible *sphoṭa* is over and above the sounds which are many in number and are uttered by the speaker in a temporal sequence. This means that the separate letters of a word or words of the sentence merely manifest the *sphoṭa* or meaning-whole. As a rule, the sounds, which are uttered by the speaker, manifest the expressive word, which already exists in the hearer. In other words, when one utters a word, which is in his mind, he produces a sequence of different sounds in order to make a sense out of many words. So it is not the manifesting sounds, which convey the meaning, but the indivisible sequenceless word that is hidden behind the visible words. That is why the listener though first hears a series of sounds he ultimately perceives the utterance as a unity.

The second *kāṇda* of *Vākyapadīya* occupies a central question whether it is the sentence (*vākya*) or the word (*pada*) that constitute the primary unit of language. *Kārika* II.57 calls the upholders of the sentence *vākyavādins*, i.e., the grammarians and the upholders of the word as *padadarśins*, i.e., the Mīmāmsakas. In contrast to the Mīmāmsakas who conceive the sentence meaning or the complete thought as resulting from the summation of the individual meanings, Bhartṛhari understands *sphoṭa* primarily as an indivisible sentence which is expressive of sense. Technically it is also called *akaa vākyasphoṭa*.

The sentence is the fundamental linguistic fact and letters and words are unreal abstractions from it. The basic logic behind his thinking is that the whole is prior to the parts. Bhartṛhari makes his stand clear by observing that man does not speak in individual words. For it is the whole idea or complete thought which is the expressive aspect of *Śabda* (*sphoṭa*). He gives an example for it. Even when a word is used merely in the form of a substantive noun (e.g. 'tree'), the verb 'to be' is always understood so that what is indicated is really a complete thought (e.g. 'It is a tree').[10] Completeness of meaning is then the test of a sentence. It is a plain truth that without the unifying function of the meaning of a sentence words cannot stand; they will scatter and wither away. This means the meaning has to stand as a principle at the root of words and sentences.

Bhartṛhari's linguistic analysis is not a language game, but as it is basically linked with the spiritual discipline called *vāgyoga* which involves a theory of human life and a vision of life's end. *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* I.130 declares the *vāgyoga* as a process that involves the breaking of one's ego-sense, the sense of the 'I' and 'mine' and thereby realizing the non-differentiated Word which is the Absolute. *vāgyoga* - the *Yoga* of speech thus lends man to the complete comprehension of truth. Bhartṛhari proposes *vāgyoga*, to reach the complete absence of all sorts of differentiation and sequence. *Vāgyoga*, therefore, is a kind of meditation which aims at raising the level of the consciousness of words to the highest stage of the Word-Principle. The *vāgyoga* demands a kind of *śÒbdasamskāra,*[11] i.e., the purification of words which culminate in the attainment of the ultimate Reality.[12] It is only the proper grammar and proper use of language that will lead us beyond the mire of confusion and wrong associations. One who has attained such a state of existence is a perfect man, who distinguishes truth, speaks truth and as a result acts truthfully. Perfection in thinking, speaking and acting makes one's life more and more integrated. Thus, *Śabdatattva* of Bhartṛhari's conception, in its final analysis acts like a principle of integration, which culminates in the ultimate liberation.

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[10] Bhartṛhari, *The Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari with the Vṛtti*, tr., K.A.S Iyer (Pune: Deccan College 1995) I.24-26. Hereafter VPV.

[11] VP. I.132.

[12] As Bhartṛhari says in his *Nītiśataka*, right speech (*vāk*) alone adds to the handsomeness of one's personality more than anything else. While other things

## BEING - THE ABYSS

Now Heidegger, as the philosopher of Being explains his own philosophy as a rethinking of the traditional metaphysics of being. He proposes meditative thinking as a new way for his *Seinsdenken*. Dasein[13], man as a privileged being, always has a relation to its Being. Dasein is privileged because Da-sein is gifted with awareness of its own Being. Again man as a questioning being is the way to the questioning of Being, leading , finally to Being as the questioned. Therefore, Being for Heidegger is always Being as it enters into Dasein's understanding of Being. Being the *Da* (there) of *Sein* (Being) man is the Da-sein.[14] Being can only be revealed in Dasein. Therefore, as long as there is a Dasein, Being can be revealed. On the other hand, man is man because being breaks into openness which is the essence of man.

Man's ek-sistence is ek-static open-ness to Being. This ek-static standing of Dasein is also a standing out in the truth of Being.[15] The *Da* in

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perish the gracefulness of speech lasts forever. *Subhāshita Triśati of Bhartṛhari*, ed., W.L.S.PANSIKAR (Bombay: Pandurang Jawji 1925), 12.

[13] The word Dasein is very important in Heidegger's philosophy and is a special German expression with many indications and connotations. Literally it would mean There-being (*Da-Sein*) which would signify the relatedness of human reality to Being as well as the sense of presence, the mode of "to be" that distinguishes it from all other beings.

[14] M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, tr., J. MACQUARRIE & E. ROBINSON (New York: Harper & Row 1962), 171. Hereafter BT.

[15] M. HEIDEGGER, *Letter on Humanism* in *Basic Writings*, ed., D.F. KRELL (New York: Harper Collins 1993), 229. Hereafter LH. Heidegger makes use of the term ek-sistence in contrast to existence, in order to point out the nature of man's existence. Man's very existence is an ek-sistence, namely, a going out of himself.

Dasein is Being itself revealed or brought out of concealment into disclosure. Since disclosure in Heideggerian thinking is truth, Dasein is the truth of Being. Dasein being the "There" (presence) of Being; human existence is, in the final analysis, the openness to Being, "the standing in the lighting-process of Being."[16] By means of this openness, which belongs to his very essence man is admitted into a new region, the region in which "reasons" are neither demanded nor supplied, in which things stand forth and emerge out of their own grounds, free from the categories of metaphysical thought. The relationship between Being and man cannot be thought of in terms of the subject-object relation. Since Being is in no way a being, but is rather not-a-being, it is Nothing. This Nothingness of Being makes Dasein conscious of its inauthentic state of existence and invites it to authentic existence.

Being presents itself in Time. The Real and Time belong together. How can this be? As to the relation between Time and Being, Heidegger fixes on the notion of Presence. In the decades following the publication of BT, Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* shifted its focus. The epoch of *Being and Time* and of what is often referred to as the earlier Heidegger is followed by the epoch of later Heidegger. The problem of the ontological difference and the emphasis on the primacy of Being become more and more pronounced with the unfolding of Heidegger's way of thinking, especially in the later works. This change of emphasis from "There" to Being could be regarded as the consequence of the meditative experiencing of the coming about of the ontological difference and of the deepening of the question of Being on Heidegger's way. Heidegger referred to this change as a 'turn' and a 'completion' of the questioning that had begun with *Being and Time*. If *Being and Time* had analyzed 'man in relation to Being,' Heidegger characterized the 'turn' with an inversion in terms, as an approach to 'Being and its truth in relation to man.'[17] Heidegger suggests that in the

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This going out signifies the fundamental character of man's ek-sistence as openness to Being.

[16] LH. 229.

[17] Heidegger's acceptance and interpretation of the distinction between the earlier phase and the later development of his thought can be found in his "*Vorwort*" (Letter to Richardson, 1962), in W.J. RICHARDSON, *Phenomenology to Thought,* xx-xxii.

process of unveiling, there is a kind of granting at work which grants Being-present, while it lets-be-present that which is present, namely, beings. In this process we come again upon a granting, and thus upon an "It" which grants. Heidegger names the 'It' that grants as *Ereignis* (Event)[18]. In the event man comes to himself, discovers his identity and relationship with the Being. *Ereignis* is therefore the name given by way of anticipation to a possible 'identification' between man and Being, beyond metaphysics - to the groundless ground. But why is Being groundless? Because every form of grounding, even self, grounding would reduce Being to some kind of being.[19] Inasmuch as Being is a ground without ground, Heidegger calls it the ' abyss' that which lacks a basis and ground. Being then is both ground and abyss. The authentic experiencing of this Being which is beyond differentiations includes a movement from the philosophical God in Heidegger's interpretation to the truly divine.

## BEING IS THE SAYING

Heidegger's understanding of language has been intimately associated with his thinking of Being over the entire course of his works. Man's special relationship to Being indicates that he is active with regard to the revealing and concealing of Being in beings. Man, as engaging in this particular activity, must have a particular capability - the 'word.' This intimation of the role of the 'word' as proposed by Heidegger indicates that speech is directly involved in the disclosure of the Being of beings. Man shows himself as the entity, which talks.[20]Language emerges as being co-constitutive of the disclosedness of Dasein, the Being-in-the-world as the articulation of its intelligibility.[21] However the analysis of *Being and*

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[18] The German verb *ereignen* usually means simply 'to happen.' while the noun *Ereignis* is simply 'event.' *Ereignis* includes the root *eigen* corresponding to the English word 'own.' The *Ereignis* then is not just any event, but the event of appropriation, when something is made someone's own. This appropriation would seem to be the other side of the act of giving. So we read: 'The gift of presence is the property of appropriating.' M. HEIDEGGER, *On Time and Being,* tr. J. STAMBAUGH (New York: Harper and Row 1972), 22 .

[19] M. HEIDEGGER, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske 1957), 185

[20] BT. 208.

[21] BT. 203-204.

*Time* never directly confronts the problem of the nature of language as such. The later Heidegger moves to resolve this difficulty, as he asserts in *Letter on Humanism* that the essence of language is "that it is the house of the truth of Being."[22]

As man dwells in the clearing of Being he attends thoughtfully to the call of Being. The call of Being which precedes all verbal utterance calls upon man to respond to Being in the equally wordless mode of listening. By responding thoughtfully in silence to the call of Being man becomes manifest as that being who thinks. The call of Being indicates that man's thoughtful nature resides within the essence of language, which is the primal Saying of Being. The role of language is taken up within Being itself. Language is the clearing-and-concealing advent of Being itself. Language becomes the concrete presence of Being rather than mere articulation. In as much as language grants to man this capacity of speech Heidegger claims that language is "the foundation of human being."[23]It is the 'house of Being' - an abode given by Being to man, within which abode man is to dwell thoughtfully.[24] The essential being of language is the *Sage* (Saying) as that which shows.[25] The showing of Saying takes place when language breaks in to speech. Thus language becomes the primordial poetry through which a people speaks Being.

The primal Saying of language which is prior to all human speech is a monologue.[26] This monologue is characterized as "stillness (*Stillen*)."[27]

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[22] LH. 223

[23] LH. 230.

[24] LH. 217.

[25] M. HEIDEGGER, *On the Way to Language*, tr., P.D. HERTZ (New York: Harper and Row 1971),123. Hereafter WL. Because Heidegger finds an affinity between *Sagen* and *Zeigen* (to show-forth, to let-appear-in-the-open) Richardson, translates *Sagen* as "utter" and the word "utter" derives from the comparative form of the Anglo-Saxon *ut*, meaning "out," hence may be taken to mean "to give or bring out," sc. in the Open. (W.J. RICHARDSON, "Heidegger and the Origin of Language," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1962) 41.

[26] WL. 134.

[27] M. HEIDEGGER, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, tr., A. HOFSTADTER (New York: Harper and Row 1971), 207. Hereafter PLT.

Man belonging to Saying (*der Sage gehörend*) listens to it and its word and brings what it hears "correspondingly" into human-sounding words. Mortal speech is thus characterized as a co-respondence (*ent-sprechen*) or a response (*Nachsagen*).[28] Language "grants presence - that is Being - wherein something appears as existent."[29] Phenomena in the world occur simultaneously with the occurrence of language and the world exists only where words exist.

Language is not representative, but manifestative. Language manifests, or shows itself in that it makes things light up. Ultimately Being shows itself in language. The showing of the primal Saying of Being is prior to all human speech and is determinative of all human speech. Since primal Saying is prior to and transcends all human speech, primal Saying is wordless and is not subject to expressive utterance. Nevertheless, primal Saying motivates human speech by giving a call to man to come into Being as that thoughtful being which he is. According to Heidegger human speech is always and essentially a response to the primal call of Being, man's response is most authentically to listen to the call of Being. But as a man listens thoughtfully to the call of Being, he is led to express his understanding of this call to his fellows according to the utterance of human speech. Thus, speech is understood to be derivative of the primal Saying of the call of Being. Hence, language for Heidegger, is not merely an instrument of communication, but is basically the coming of Being into Saying.

## BHARTṚHARI AND HEIDEGGER: MEETING GROUNDS

Bhartṛhari is primarily concerned about leading man from inauthentic to authentic existence, from absorption in the object to self-realization. Heidegger also, it seems, expresses his dissatisfaction over the 'thrown fallenness' of every day life. Heidegger in rediscovering for the West, man's belongingness to *Ereignis* comes closer to Bhartṛhari's man who dissociates himself from untruth through *vāgyoga* and achieves union with the Real, *Śabdatattva*. Man, says Heidegger, is the 'Neighbour of

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[28] WL. 134.

[29] WL. 146.

Being.' Similarly for Bhartṛhari an analysis and reflection on the nature of the self is a means of knowing Brahman, the *Śabdatattva*.

From an ontological perspective, Brahman stands for true Reality (Being). A reflection on the Reality of Brahman in philosophical terms, brings us closer to Heidegger's concept of Being. Because Being is no-being (no-thing), it cannot be described as such or such. Heidegger considers Being as the groundless ground and Abyss of all human understanding. In the eventing of Being, it seems, Heidegger is not distant from Bhartṛhari moving from finite to the unspoken realms of Being. Because the Truth of Being is forever hidden from us, Being in the last analysis remains a mystery.

Time, *kāla* for Bhartṛhari, is the power of *Śabdatattva*. They belong to each other. Being and Time according to Heidegger belong together. Heidegger often speaks of the Light of Being, or clearing which brings Light. According to Bhartṛhari Being shines forth in the breaking forth of the word. In Bhartṛhari's view Truth (*satya*) and Being (*sat*) are intimately inter-connected. *Sat* is *satya*. *Satya* as the claim of Being is the *sphoṭa* emerging from *Sat*. When *sphoṭa* is listened to in silence, it is *Śabda* - the *ādiśabda* (primordial utterance) which is at the same time *anāhataśabda* (unmanifest utterance). According to Heidegger, in the eventing of Being happens Truth and Dasein becomes the place of the truth of Being. Being reveals, comes-to-pass in being and being dwells in the light of Being. *Sein* in its innermost nature is *Sage*. Being is *Logos*. The Real, *Śabdatattva* expresses itself through the breaking forth of words. It shines forth as the *satya*, truth in everything.

For Heidegger the primal Saying prior to all human speech is a monologue which might correspond to Bhartṛhari's *sphoṭa* in the unuttered stage of speech as the indivisible whole. Now the primal Saying is brought to expression through human speaking in the same manner *sphoṭa* breaks in to words through human speech. In Heidegger's view phenomena in the world occur simultaneously with the occurrence of language. This seems to be what Bhartṛhari meant when he says 'all things that comprise reality are of the nature of word.'

## CONCLUSION

The question of Being is a bridge that links the traditional philosophy to the philosophy up to our times. All things are and can be Being and a form of Being. To the extent, therefore, that things are, they are unified by that which is common to all of them, that they are Being. It serves as a unifying aspect of everything. In this sense, Being constitutes the unity of everything that is. The question of Being is at the same time a quest for a way of thought that can redeem our humanity by overcoming the 'forgetfullness of Being' and so enable us to live in the world as truly our home, in the "neighbourhood" of Being. Ek-sisting to Being - *Śabdatattva*, being receives the light of Being, unveiling the truth of Being. Then the being speaks the primordial *Sage - sphoṭa* which breaks forth as Being. In this deeper unity of the Being - *Śabdatattva*, being finds its authenticity. Heidegger's path of thinking the Being and Bhartṛhari's meditative way of knowing the *Śabdatattva* lead one to the belonging togetherness of Being and being in a deeper unity which is a continued process beyond all conceptualizing.

# TRINITARIAN EXPERIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN AND ADVAITIC EXPERIENCE OF A HINDU

**Jojo Joseph**[♦]

## 1.0. Introduction

This essay contains some reflections of an ordinary Christian layman, who thinks that a marginal cross section of can be provoked and motivated into the Spiritual experience of oneness with the Spirit through a comparative study of such Spiritual experience of Hindus. Can the Spiritual experiences of Christians and Hindus be similar? Can we compare the Trinitarian experience of a Christian and the advaitic experience of a Hindu? The average Christians would have considered such questions heretical a century ago. The perception of Christians about other religions has undergone a sea change in the past few decades as a result of various forms of inter-religious dialogue, in-depth comparative studies and prayerful contemplation carried out by a large number of pious and committed theologians who were inspired and encouraged by the Second Vatican Council. The tremendous work being done by the present-day theologians who are impelled by the call of prophetic mission is poised to take us forward to a rightful conclusion and a mature theology of religions. The evolving perceptions are likely to cause consternation among the dogmatic Christians who are unwilling to open up themselves to the theory and practice of the sublime concepts of Spirituality underlying the superficial doctrinal concepts in the Bible. This essay tries to reflect on the doctrines of Holy Trinity and *Advaita* and to conceptualize and characterize an ideal Christian and an ideal Advaitin, with special emphasis on the experience or realization of divinity hidden within oneself. The concepts of the Holy Spirit, the Word and the Father are compared with similar concepts in Hinduism such as the *Ātman, Purusha* and Brahman.

## 2.0. Nature of Doctrines

It is pertinent to reflect on the nature of dogmas and doctrines before

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we look into the doctrine of Trinity. A dogma or a doctrine is a principle or a tenet taught by an authority to be true. A doctrine has its roots in scripture, while a dogma has no scriptural support. The meaning or essence of dogmas or doctrines is incomprehensible to the ordinary followers, who rarely try to comprehend such mysteries. They are expected to believe in them blindly. The Truths or Wisdom concealed in such dogmas and doctrines are seldom understood since no language is adequate to express them fully.

Pearls of wisdom can be divided into two categories. One contains eternal truths and the other contains truths that are valid only within a specific boundary such as geography, culture, community or period of time. Wisdom is experiential in nature. It occurs as a result of long and arduous efforts and practice. It exists in the minds of wise people, and in scriptures. It can be explained but not served to others in a digestible form. For example, one who has experienced God cannot write a bestseller book, "How to experience God in thirty days". Seeds of wisdom do not germinate and bear fruit in barren soil.

Doctrines and dogmas, which contain non-ultimate truths, die out with passage of time, when its inner content becomes no more meaningful. Those, which conceal ultimate truths, do not die out with time, since every now and then there arise a few enlightened persons who expound their meaning and keep them alive. Such doctrines are seldom discarded since the genuineness of the inner content or kernel is not doubted. They loose their mysterious nature when majority of the members of a community becomes substantially transformed or enlightened, so as to understand their inner essence.

Doctrines are like fruits with hard shells. Every religion or tradition may have its own doctrines. They all may be sweet when their hard shells are broken. Intellectual discourses or public debates cannot break the encrustation or shell. The task of breaking the shell is quite tedious and involved. It has to be broken independently by individuals to relish the kernel. The experience of such individuals can be inspiring to others. They are capable or rejuvenating and reinterpreting doctrines using knowledge or information that were not available previously. We may say that those who have broken them have become enlightened during this process. "The unfolding of Thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Ps 119: 130). Those who understand may succeed in transferring their understanding to a few others. The wisdom of enlightened ones when carried forward blindly by others again becomes doctrines. Those who treat doctrines as eternal unexplainable mysteries reject meaningful interpretations given by wise ones.

Breaking the shell of doctrine is not essential for practice of Spirituality. Role of doctrines is indeed negligible in our Spiritual journey. One who has a Spiritual quest does not hold on blindly to the doctrines present in ones tradition. By the time his Spiritual pilgrimage reaches an advanced stage of enlightenment, the doctrines also become comprehensible to him. Even though he may become internally aware about the true meaning of doctrines, he may not feel the necessity of explaining this to others or to convince others. If the Spirit urges him to do so, he takes up the issue of doctrines and interprets them for the benefit of others. Otherwise he goes about carrying out his mission as dictated by his inner Spirit without bothering about doctrines.

One need not be averse to using tools or knowledge that is external to one's tradition to break open the doctrines. As long as they do not spoil or contaminate the inner kernel, any tool can be used. For example, two hard doctrines from different traditions may be compared or rubbed against each other to break open both. Sweetness of both should be tasted without mixing them up. Doctrines from various traditions can hardly ever match one another. But the similarities can sometimes be breath taking. One who has learned to unfold doctrines in one's own tradition may easily unfold the doctrines in other traditions, if he/she wills so. There is no need to do so unless one gets an inner urge to do it.

### 3.0 Need for Studying and Experiencing the Truth of Other Religions

Should a Christian try to pry open the mystery of doctrines of other religions? Process of a Christian's spiritual pilgrimage could be as follows:

1)The message of Jesus has to be put forth in a convincing manner to others, through the principle of love. There is no question of coercion. There will also be no arguments, except in a friendly atmosphere. I shall use all my opportunities to do this, so that others too come to the deep inner conviction about the message of Jesus. Let others also enjoy the peace and bliss from communion with God that ensues as a result of practicing the way of life taught by Jesus.

2) The Church has been carrying out missionary activities for quite a long time. What are the reasons for our failure in winning majority of the Hindus, Muslims and others into our fold? What are the forces that prevent them from entering into our fold? Should I not look into their scriptures and their Spiritual experience and compare them with my Bible and my Spiritual experience? Perhaps I can win them over by pointing out their inadequacies and mistakes?

3) Before I try to put forth the message of Christ to others, let me try to understand their ways of worship and Spirituality. Interaction with like-minded people of other religions is likely to be mutually beneficial and fruitful. I wish to see whether I can learn or gain anything from their scriptures and Spiritual practices. As a Christian, I have to accept whatever is true, good, and ennobling. I have to be inter-religious if I have to be truly religious.

A person who seriously pursues the second or third may find that he/she is able to penetrate the symbolic structures of other traditions. Trying to experience God through the symbols or concepts of other religious traditions is a quite serious and salutary exercise. The same ultimate Reality is experienced by each tradition through different symbolic structure, which may not be comparable or compatible with those of other traditions. Even within the same Christian tradition, each person may have an entirely different experience. One may undergo a Trinitarian experience if one dwells upon the mystery of Holy Trinity. Another one who dwells upon the mystery of Eucharist may end up in the Eucharistic experience. A third one may get another experience if he dwells on the concept of sacrifice. A Christians who has not transcended the symbolic structure of his own tradition is likely to find himself in a maze or labyrinth if he tries to experience God through the concept of other religions. If he succeeds, he may realize that beneath the outer shells, the inner kernel of dogmas and doctrines taste equally sweet as in the Christian tradition.

During the process of a comparative study of the doctrines of different traditions, we should not allow the real meaning to be cut or pruned or lost, rather we should allow our wrong perceptions to be cut and pruned. Then a person may come to the conclusion that the final Spiritual experience (or state of consciousness) of oneness with the whole of mankind as well as with the whole of existence is similar, irrespective of the tradition followed. He may not know that such an experience is termed by some as Trinitarian experience or by others as Advaitic experience or as Cosmic Consciousness. Studying such names and terminology are the work of theologians. Experiencing is important, not analyzing or naming them. A Christian who has undergone such an experience may find that his perceptions as an ideal Christian are matching closely with similar perceptions of ideal Spiritual practitioners in other religions. This awareness occurs only if he gets an opportunity to interact with such people or to interpret the real inner meanings of their scripture.

A Christian who has undergone enlightening Spiritual experience through more than one religion may also find that his perceptions are not in agreement with those of his peers and of the doctrinal committee of the Church, even though he is sure about his deep grounding in his Christian belief and practice. A sincere and successful enquiry into the Spiritual experience of followers of other religions by an inquisitive Christian may land him in an unenviable situation. He may become rejected and persecuted by his own community, especially if he lacks the theological language and tools required for effectively communicating his inner knowledge or wisdom to others. Christians who champion the worth and values of other religions besides their own religion normally get the dubious distinction of being "double-religious". They are misunderstood to be indecisive, confused and living under constant tension, just because they are found to struggle hard unsuccessfully to convince others about their inner vision. Christians who do not want to end up in such an unenviable situation should never undertake a serious attempt to experience the truth of other religions. This problem never arises among Hindus, since their tradition allows a wider ecumenical vision. Their tradition accepts truths from outside, such as secular science as well as truths from other religions, as long as they are verifiable through inner knowledge or wisdom as experienced by the "realized yogins." In their tradition, acquired wisdom or inner knowledge *(parā-vidyā)* is superior to the knowledge given by the literal interpretation of scriptures *(aparā vidyā)*. Yogins or Spiritual stalwarts in their tradition have definitely demonstrated that the inner knowledge gained by many of them is indeed complementary and not contradictory. When they come across the Gospel, they quickly grasp and appreciate its message, but at the same time, they feel sorry for those Christians who hang on to its literal meaning and distort the message of gospel.

Rev. S.J. Samartha, points out that true scriptural hermeneutics involves not merely a literal exercise, but a tedious process of Spiritual transformation.

> One should note that the Asian religious traditions such as the Hindu and the Buddhist, do not believe that one can develop a scriptural hermeneutics which, by itself will yield the truth. True knowledge is not the fruit of logical investigation or the exegesis of scriptures, but a transformation of the knowing subject. Gregarious (Mar Gregorios, Bishop of Syrian Orthodox Church) connects this with the Eastern tradition. Both Indian philosophy and Eastern tradition, he says, generally hold the view that one can "know" Reality only when one's whole life becomes pure. Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes the need to cleanse the mind and control the passions in order to "see" God. The basic hermeneutic principle is that of "apatheia" or a personality that is not only free from passions, which dominate the mind, and from all evil inclinations, but also is positively developed to conform to the image of God. This emphasis on the discipline of the body, mind and heart *(sādhana)* as a pre-requisite to any hermeneutics is too often neglected by Asian Christians (*One Christ-Many Religions; Toward a Revised Christology*, p.81).

Under the above circumstances, it is quite logical to come to the conclusion that studying and trying to experience the truth of other religions is strenuous and painful especially for Christians, who are likely to face rejection by their peers. However, such Christians who think that they have cracked the mystery of multiplicity of religions remain unperturbed, under the grip of their Spiritual experience. They are ready to stand up for the Truth, whatever it be, braving peer-rejection. They are driven by a vision of "wider ecumenism" towards a Kingdom of Heaven on earth along with like-minded people of other religions.

The dreams of Spiritually enlightened persons form all religions converge to the ultimate objective of building a heaven on earth. They all envision a Kingdom of God with a boundary much wider than that dreamt by the orthodox Christians. They foresee the reign of God, or the divinization of cosmos, where everything is refined and turned back into God. They realize that in the beginning, until human beings were formed with the freedom to "fall" or to differentiate themselves from the basic divine nature, the world fully expressed the underlying divine presence with all its pristine purity, holiness and perfection. Enlightened people work hard to exterminate evil from the face of the earth. They know that evil is not present anywhere else in the universe, except in the minds of humans, who enjoy the unique freedom to express evil besides their basic divine nature.

Dr. Michael Amaladoss S.J., who has studied in detail, the question of "double-religiosity" among Christians, observes that this modern phenomenon is becoming more and more common especially after the Second Vatican Council. He does not feel that "double-religious" Christians are "eccentric individuals" with "idiosyncratic behavior". He suggests that "the phenomenon of double belongingness itself can be seen as a symbol of the call to transcendence and convergence, leading to ultimate eschatological community and harmony" ("Double Religious Belonging and Liminality", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections*, January 2002).

## 4.0. The Concept of Holy Trinity

Christians conceive of the absolute Reality as three-in-one person and ascribe masculine gender to this Reality. In the advaitic tradition the absolute Reality, Brahman, is expressed in neutral gender. The well-known Trinitarian concepts in Hinduism, such as creation-sustenance-dissolution and existence-consciousness-bliss *(sat-cit-ānanda)* do not compare well with the concept of Christian Trinity. However, the independent concepts of Brahman, *Purusha, and Ātman* when brought together as a trio, compare well with the concept of Holy Trinity, provided we are ready to conceptualize the Holy Trinity in a new light as proposed below, different from the traditional understanding.

### 4.1. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity is the Eternal Word

The Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit are all one and the same with no difference at all. The second Person of the Trinity is the eternal Word or Logs who is a Spirit. He has a wider meaning than that of the incarnate Word of Jesus. Incarnate Word is the self-emptied or humbled form of the exalted Word (Phil 2:6,7). "God has made Himself known in the fullest possible way" through incarnation (*Redemptoris Missio*, n.5). However, no one knows the real identity and name of the Word except He Himself (Rev 19: 12,13). Conformity of mind *(tādātmya)* with Him is essential to know Him fully (1 Cor. 2: 14-16; Gal 4:19; Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49). All Biblical evidences lead us to believe that the second person of the Trinity is a Spirit or dynamic reality who is responsible for causing, shaping up, sustaining, supporting, and containing the universe within Himself and who fills up, permeates, animates, evolves and causes it to return back into its original unseen form within Himself at the end, remaining ever as its indweller. At the end of the cosmic exercise, when everything is successfully concluded and wound up, His cosmic functions also come to an end. He then returns to the First Person of the Trinity who will then become all in all (1Cor. 15:28).

The New King James Version of the Bible depicts the Second Person of Trinity clearly as the Word. "There are three who bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 7:7). However other versions such as RSV and Jerusalem Bible interpret the same verse like this. "There are three witnesses, the Spirit, water and blood, and the three of them coincide".

### 4.2. The Word is the Indweller or Self of the Universe

The Word is Spirit. He has a cosmic role, with multiple functions such as creations, sustenance, self-revelation and salvation. The incarnate Word has come to the world in flesh to continue the function of revelation and salvation. We cannot limit the second person of the Trinity within the human person of Jesus. The Word is *Alpha* and *Omega,* the starting point and the ending point of the universe (Rev. 1:11). He gradually unfolds the universe from Himself and reveals Himself indirectly through it. He also reveals Himself and His plans through those whom He chooses, in order to guide His creation to perfection and salvation. The second person has a much wider meaning in the Bible than what we normally ascribe to Him.

Following are some excerpts from the Bible showing the cosmic role of the Word: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him, nothing was made that was made" (Jn. 1:1. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by Word of God so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrew 11:3). "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times". (1 Peter. 1:20). ... "whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds, who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all thins by the Word of His power" (Hebrew 1:2-3.

The Word reveals Himself to all those who seek Him fervently with a simple (purified) heart. He is present in the innermost minds of all humans. He is the one who gives light to all those who come into the world (Jn. 1:9). Neither Jesus nor the scriptures exhaust him fully. He is present throughout the universe, with no discontinuity at all. Everything taking place from beginning till the end of the universe reveals the Word, who is the intelligence or Information that drives it. The universe is contained by the Word (Col. 1:17). The evolution of the universe from the Big Bang to the Big Crunch is an expression or indirect revelation of the Word. the creation, sustenance and final dissolution of the universe are the functions of the Word. Discerning deepest thoughts and desires of the creatures is His function (Heb 4:12). Causing the power of discrimination and conscience and generating divine thoughts in human minds is His function. Bringing the creation back from their differentiated state back to the undifferentiated divine state of oneness with Himself is His function. He reveal His plans to the discerning ones who work as His microphones and extensions in the World. He utilizes them to reform and transform His creation back to their true/intended divine nature. In short, creation, sustenance, revelation and salvation are some of His functions. All these functions are cosmic in nature and hence the word cannot be limited within human flesh or any other frameword, even though we can think of them as manifestations that lead us to the ultimate truth. Everything in the cosmos reveals His glory and nature to a lesser or greater extent. The incarnate Word revealed the personal qualities of the eternal Word with utmost perfection and also demonstrated the functions of self-revelation and salvation.

The Bible addresses the second person as the first-born (Col 1:15) or the only begotten Son of the Eternal Spirit. The Father-Son relationship does not seem to point to the human role of Jesus as Son, but points to a metaphysical relationship between the eternal role (Father/Brahman) and the transitory cosmic role (Word/*Purusha).* The Cosmic *Purusha* in the Upanishads encompassing the universe is envisaged to be self-born *(svayambhu)* or first-born *(AdiPurusha),* who proceeds undifferentiated or undivided from the eternal Spirit, (*Antaryamin, Prana, Prajna*, and *Prajapathy). Purusha,* the active or eternal dynamic Spirit props up and sustains *Prakriti*, the passive ephemeral material world. The Word or cosmic *Purusha* represents or denotes the Spirit that dwells in the universe integrating everything contained in it. The Word is not a human person though he revealed Himself in the limited form of a human person, Jesus. for want of a suitable term, we may use the masculine gender to denote the word.

It has to be pointed out that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) has not yet yielded to the theological submission that the eternal Word has a wider meaning than that of the incarnate Word. Dominus Jesus says at the end of n. 10: "The theory which would attribute after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised 'in addition to' or 'beyond' the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith". This affirmation arises from the undue fear that the new perception will lead to contradictions, such as opposing functions of the eternal Word and the incarnate Word.

### 4.3. Holy Spirit is the Indweller or Self of Human Beings

Holy Spirit or *Atman* is the Spirit that dwells as the witness, conscience or inner pure consciousness in all human beings, irrespective of whether they accept His presence in them or not. Human body is the temple of God. God dwells in every human being, even though most of the people do not recognize this fact. At a particular point of time during the Spiritual growth of a person, he experiences the presence of God within himself. As he grows Spiritually further, he feels that his soul *(jiva)* has merged or dovetailed with the inner Spirit. The soul or jiva is different from the Spirit or *Atman* in ordinary people, but the soul attains union or communion with the Spirit at an advanced stage of purification during the Spiritual pursuit. When Jesus declared, "I and my Father are one" (Jn. 10:30), He did not mean that His physical body was the epitome of Godhead. It only meant that His inner soul was in perfect communion with the Eternal Spirit. This fact remained true from His birth till death, unlike the rishis of ancient India who attained such a stage of perfect communion with the Eternal Spirit at the height of their long Spiritual sadhana. Their declaration "Aham Brahmasmi" meaning "I and the Brahman are one" shows clearly that they had experienced perfect communion with God at the point of this declaration. It need not be interpreted as an act of blasphemy. Such an experience is the right of every human being and is the aim of Spiritual pursuits in all religion. The very purpose of Christ-event was to demonstrate this fact to humanity and to make His "Abba experience" or oneness with Father transparent and model to the whole of mankind (Gal 4:6). He wanted to spread the meaning and message of His life to the entire world through His followers, as to bring in the reign of God or to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

### 4.4. All Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are one and the Same

The three persons of the holy Trinity - the holy Spirit *(Atman)* understood as the indweller of humans, the Word *(Purusha)* as the indweller of the universe and the eternal Spirit (Brahman) who precedes and surpasses the universe - are all one and the same, with no difference at all. We split them into different persons only to understand the different functions of the same Spirit. The Father, the Word and the holy Spirit are all one and the same with no difference at all. There is absolutely difference between the three persons of the Trinity.

To recapitulate the concept of oneness of the different persons of the holy Trinity, let us consider the third, second and first persons respectively once again. (i) We have tried to conceive of the third person or Holy Spirit *(Atman)* as the indweller of all human, who gives life to all and who impels them all towards perfection and holiness and identity of mind with Him. (ii) We have tried to conceive of the second person or the Word *(Purusha)* as the summation of the overall presence of God within the universe who crates, sustains, animates and guides the universe from Big Bang to Big Crunch, always remaining as its indweller. This Spirit has the functions of creation, revelation and salvation of the whole of creation. The incarnate Word came to the world in flesh to continue the work of revelation and salvation, and hence Jesus does not exhaust the mystery of the Word. (iii) we have also tried to conceive of the first person or the eternal Spirit (Brahman) as the Ultimate reality who is not limited either within human beings or within the universe, but who encompasses and sustains not merely the universe, but the whole of reality, much beyond our universe, and beyond our comprehension.

We have noted earlier that our true inner or Spirit is pure consciousness. The nature of ultimate reality is pure consciousness. We should delineate the normal consciousness, which we normally experience through the equipment of our mind/brain. The consciousness experienced by a purified soul who is in communion with God is pure and holy and it is an indivisible part of the same ultimate Reality, who permeates the universe and causes matter to be alive. This pure consciousness experienced by a realized soul within himself as the indweller is understood as holy Spirit or the *Atman*. The same Spirit passes through all entities, filling up or hovering over everything within the universe and beyond the universe. We give it different names such as Holy Spirit, the Word and the Eternal Spirit in order to come to the right understanding about its unity and eternity.

## 5.0. Conceptualizing an Ideal Christian and an Ideal Advaitin

One who merely keeps faith in Christ or who is baptized is normally called a Christian. Any one who merely professes the philosophy of Advaita (non-duality) is normally called an advaitin. However an ideal Christian is one who has become Christ-like and attained oneness of soul with the Father. Jesus is an ideal Christian and an ideal model for everyone on earth. He satisfies the ideal requirements specified by all the religions of the world. An ideal advaitin is one whose self or *jiva* has attained oneness or non-duality with the indwelling Spirit or *Atman*. In this essay, the term advaitin is used to mean only an ideal advaitin.

Some people believe that the physical world is merely an illusion *(maya)* and that our life on earth is meant to be freely enjoyed according to our will and pleasure. They are not bothered whether their thoughts, words and deeds are likely to infringe upon the rights and freedom of others or to inflict any damage, loss, pain or misery to others and to the environment. An advaitin strongly condemns such casual attitudes. He exhorts everyone to discharge his or her duties towards family and society and to engage in one's chose field of work with utmost care and concern for others based on the principle of righteousness (dharma).

An advaitin do advocate the concept of illusory nature of the world, but in a quite different metaphysical sense. He emphasizes that the Spiritual reality is the only eternal reality. Physical reality is ephemeral as reiterated in the Bible. The seen world is "...not made of things which are seen" (Heb 11:3). "the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:18). Hence the advaitin asks others to realize the insignificance or temporary nature of the material world and to renounce them internally. This is required to enable them to enter into communion with the inner Spiritual reality or consciousness, who is the indweller of all humans as well as of the whole of reality, cosmic and extra cosmic.

An advaitin is internally aware that at the deepest level, matter is not made up of physical particles, but of an unseen dynamic Reality or intelligence. Others normally misunderstand the concept of advaitins that the external façade of universe is illusory or ephemeral and that the underlying essence or intelligence animating the universe is eternal and unitary. A true advaitin is again misunderstood when he exclaims at the peak of his Spiritual experience, "I am Brahman, you are Brahman, and everything is Brahman". Scientists exploring the deepest mysteries about the constitution of matter have been unable to catch-up with the ultimate physical particles or building blocks that were expected to explain the history, mystery and the future of the universe. Today they are being confronted with the concept that the universe is preceded, constituted and driven by information or intelligence presumably in the form of a non-physical dynamic wave function underlying it. If such a theory gets proven, then the advaitic experience will become meaningful even to the scientists.

Advaitins are internally aware that the unseen Spiritual reality or the ultimate reality (Brahman) underlying the whole of creation is indivisible, unitary and eternal with no beginning or end, while all physical entities have their own span of life. A flower may live for a day, a man for a century, a star for a billion years and the universe perhaps for a hundred billion years. Eternal reality is subject to change and renewal whereas the underlying reality is changeless and eternal. In this sense, they proclaim the oneness of all existence, and the ephemeral nature of its external façade (physical world). An advaitin who has a wide Spiritual vision envisions everything in the universe to be the manifestation of Brahman. In this sense, you, me and everything else are divine.; such a perception comes at the height of an advaitin's spiritual experience. They exhort everyone to experience this ultimate Reality deep within themselves, as the indweller or self, or as the innermost being or Spirit. They teach that our mind/ intellect can be dovetailed with this Spirit or self through a process of removal of ignorance. This is done by purification of mind or by the purging of all negative or sinful traits from the flesh/genes. This involves leading a purposeful, meaningful and holy life, wherein all fellow creatures are treated with equal respect and love, replacing all selfish motives and desires with an altruistic mentality. An advaitin is not bothered about his personal interest. He is ready to give up everything for the sake of others, since he considers his physical body to be an instrument that is entrusted to him temporarily to fulfill the mission dictated by the inner Spirit, who is the same in all human (*Atman,* the holy Spirit) and who is the same as the cosmic Spirit (*Purusha*, the Word) and the same as the eternal Spirit (Brahman, the Father)

An advaitin hates evil actions, but not evildoers. While encountering an aggressor or an evildoer, he remembers that beneath the external façade of their ignorance, there exist the Spirit, who animates everyone. The advaitin seizes every such opportunity of interaction to shatter the sheath of ignorance *(avidya)* in them and to enlighten them towards the awareness of the inner divinity hidden beneath their ignorance. He convinces them that they too can attain divine nature or oneness with the inner Spirit through the elimination of ignorance. This leads them to purify their minds to achieve union of the soul with the Spirit. The awareness of oneness with the Spirit and of the false façade of ignorance eclipsing the inherent divinity of creation impels the real advaitins to speak about the oneness of existence and of the falsified nature of the external reality, which hides the true inner spiritual Reality. This concept of *maya* is normally misunderstood by others. However it helps advaitins to face adverse events and circumstances in the world with the balanced and positive approach and to turn such events into factors of change and transformation, beneficial to them and the society at large. An advaitin is able to sense the divine hand beneath every eventuality that unfolds before him, and to take a positive step forward even under the worst situations.

An advaitin always starts from the dualistic concept of the world until he comes to the realization of non-dualism. After realization, he does not claim that his physical body has become Brahman. The identity is only with respect to the soul, which has finally reached the destination after the necessary purification. An advaitin is aware of the steps he has taken to reach the final stage of self-realization or non-dualism. He does not denigrate other spiritual aspirants who hold on to the concept of dualism. But he definitely entreats them to continue the process of self-purification or purging of all genetic and self-made negative instincts in the flesh that act against the voice of the indwelling Spirit or *Atman*. The final goal is unequivocally, full surrender to the *Atman* and the experience of oneness with the *Atman/Purusha/*Brahman.

Even though the concept of Advaita was recognized by the ancient Indian sages more than two thousand years ago, there is no better example of advaitin than Jesus. Normally an advaitin is one who has attained Spiritual heights through purification of body and mind, such that he experiences oneness of his soul with the inner Spirit. He is then led by the Spirit, and all his thoughts and deeds become dovetailed with that of the Spirit. Being the incarnation of the word, Jesus experienced oneness of His soul with the Spirit from birth till death. In this sense, he is quite different from the other advaitins. We also cannot preclude the possibility of other incarnation who would have maintained perfect communion with the Eternal Spirit like Jesus from birth till death. It can be expected that such people also would have proclaimed their oneness with the Spirit and executed His will on earth. Such experience of oneness with the Father is the right of every person on earth.

An advaitin who claims, "I and the Brahman are one" can be judged by the fruits of his words and deeds. The real advaitin does not claim equality with God in the literal sense. He cannot be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. Let us consider the case of Jesus. his own self-perception was that of a prophet (Mk. 6:4; Mt. 13:57). His contemporaries also perceived him as the prophet from Nazareth (Mt. 21:11; Mk. 8:28; Mt. 16:14; Lk. 7:39). He did not count himself equal to the Father in heaven. He said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). We have to remember that He had also said in the advaitic style "I and my Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). Being in the form of a human, Jesus was subject to the laws of nature. He experienced hunger and temptations (Mat. 4;2,3). He confessed, "I can of Myself do nothing" (Jn. 5:30). He also said that only the Father in heaven knows "the day and hour" when the "heaven and earth will pass away" (Mat. 24:36). He experienced agony and weakness in flesh prior to crucifixion (Mat 26: 38-41). He felt forsaken at the time of death (Mat 27:46). All these show that the oneness or non-duality experienced by Jesus with the Father was only at the inner level and not at the external level of His physical being. The Father in heaven is not subject to temptations, hunger, pain, death etc. hence in this sense, there is dualism between the Father and Jesus (the incarnate Word) at the external physical level, while there is non-duality between them at the inner level.

When a person is in perfect and constant communion with God, he does not become omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He needs to know only what is essential for him to execute the will of God, according to the prompting of the Spirit. The Spirit prompts each word and deed and the flesh complies with it despite some resistance. The Spirit complements his worldly knowledge and capabilities with additional Spiritual wisdom and various forms of gifts needed to execute the divine plan through him. He remains fully surrendered to God day and night and follows the promptings of the Spirit in total, rejecting or neglecting the promptings of the flesh or the body/mind/intellect. Even while executing the divine will, he may not know the totality of the divine plan. But he is content with the wisdom imparted to him and goes ahead with his mission in the world unaffected by anything else other than the prompting of the Spirit.

If anybody thinks than an advaitin is a self-centred person, who is concerned only about his own salvation, with no responsibilities whatsoever to the society at large, he is grossly mistaken. An advaitin is one who has realized or experienced his oneness with fellow human beings he does not focus attention on the external appearance, features and behaviour of others. He respects and treats everyone equally, knowing well that the Self or Spirit that drives others in the same as the Spirit that guides him from behind his mind and intellect. There is a strong feeling of interconnectedness and inter dependence. He recognizes very well his duties and responsibilities to the society and remains as a strong and powerful link in a chain· that connects all creatures. He is desirous of bringing everyone else into the awareness of the Spirit and he is fully devoted to this cause of bringing the reign of God on earth.

It is also a gross misunderstanding to think that an advaitin has to practice vanaprastha, renouncing his duties to his family and the society. It would be correct to say that an advaitin is a self-centred person, whose mind is synchronized with that of the indwelling Spirit or Self, and whose thoughts and deeds are prompted by the Self. Yes, an advaitin renounces the world and all the worldly comforts, rewards and desires inwardly. Anyone can become an advaitin by practicing inner virtues and renunciation. A king, a soldier, a business magnate, or a fashion model can become an advaitin. If a king desires to practice advaitic Spirituality, he has to discharge all his duties to his subjects sincerely and dispassionately, upholding dharma in all respects without desiring personal gains in return for the service as a king. He should be just and truthful and intersected only in the welfare of the subjects and not in satisfying his personal needs such as ego, pride, greed, fame, power, and other worldly desires. He should follow the practice of "nishkama karma" (duty with no expectation of reward). However there is no taboo on receipt of legitimate remuneration for services done, on leading a family life, or on enjoyment of rightful needs of the body. When the king, or any one for that matter, is so engaged in his duties, guided by the sarathy (chariot-driver) or the indwelling *Atman* seated behind him inside the chariot of his own body, the five restless horses representing his senses are fully controlled by the rein of his mind and also by the intellect, both of which are fully surrendered to the sarathy seated behind him. The *Bhagavad Gita* pronounces various methods that can be fruitfully employed by spiritual aspirants who are desirous of achieving Yoga (union) of their self (soul, *jiva)* with the Self (indwelling Spirit, *Atman*).

Some advaitins may choose to renounce physically the worldly comforts and opt for a life of solitude and contemplation. Having discharged all their duties to the family and having renounced everything they had in the world, and having eliminated all heir personal egos, they do not have any further personal goal in heir life other than the welfare of the world. They channel all heir energy through meditation and prayer, aimed at the welfare of the world. They renounce even their desire to leave their physical body for the ultimate union with the Spirit, knowing well that their earthly prayers and meditation contributes to the progressive Spiritual evolution and divinization of the world towards the reign of God on earth.

## 6.0 Oneness with God is an Experience Common to People of all Religions

The experience of oneness with God is attained only at the highest level of Spiritual progress. This enlightenment or comprehension is common to people of all religions. The Indian sages who attained such a stage after years of spiritual *sadhana* or purification process, experienced oneness of their soul (jiva)with their inner Spirit (*Atman*). They realized that their inner Spirit (*Atman*) is the same as the cosmic Spirit (*Purusha*), and the eternal Spirit) (Brahman). At their state of ecstasy, they declared boldly that their souls were one with *Atman/Purusha/*Brahman. At their state of meditation and communion with the Spirit, they transcended the feeling of two-ness or Advaita and felt that they were one with God, even though their physical bodies continued to be subject to the limitations and imperfections common in this world, such as temptations, hunger, pain, death etc.

Enlightenment of a person occurs at a stage when his mind is transformed to such a stage of purification or perfection that his thoughts and actions are fully dovetailed with that of the ultimate Reality through the indwelling Spirit. At this stage, the mind gets filled with the light of knowledge, which enables him to see everything around him a new light or perspective. There will be identity or conformity of mind between enlightened persons of all religions, since the light or knowledge that fills up the mind of all such person is the same, namely the *Vak* (symbolized as *AUM*) or the Word.

Francis de Sales experienced the union with God, while he was in sacramental union with the Eucharist (Ref. Francis de Sales, *The Love of God, A Treatise*, SFS Publications, Bangalore). He retained his external physical identity as Francis de Sales even while he claimed that his soul was "blended, absorbed and swallowed up in God". Certainly this was not a case of blasphemy. The thoughts and actions of such saintly or enlightened people get synchronized with that of God. When they find no dualism between their soul and the inner Spirit, they cry out, "Abba, Father" and declare boldly like Jesus, "I and my Father are one". (Jn 10:30; 17:21; Rom 8:15). "He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit with Him" (1 Cor 6:17). Jesus demonstrated His oneness with the Father through his words and actions one earth. Never did he say that the Father. (Mt. 5:48; 1 Pet 1:15,16). He also entreats us to become partakers of divine nature (2 Pet 1:4; Rom 8:16-30). There is also a call in the Gospel for all of us to become Sons of God, by leading a life of perfection and holiness guided by the inner Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 4:6-7).

Holiness is the real nature of every man, since our true inner Self is the holy Spirit. This we do not recognize due to our ignorance or *avidya,* the dirt or darkness accumulated in our minds genetically and through our own actions in the world. When we purify or wash away such sinful tendencies or *vasnas* through constant practice or *sadhana* with the aid of our indwelling Spirit *(antaryamin),* the darkness of mind or dirt gives way to the revelation about our own inner divine Self. The concept of sin in Christianity and the concept of *avidya* (ignorance) in Hinduism are hence closely interrelated. *Jnana* (wisdom or knowledge), the saviour who can exterminate *avidya,* is comparable to the eternal Word. Anyone who destroys sin *(avidya)* and declares that he and the Father are one need not be crucified for blasphemy. His genuineness can be verified by judging the fruits produced by his words and actions.

We tend to believe that the target of holiness imposed on us by God is impractical. We tend to tell God, "we are humans, and you have created us as born-sinners. We cannot become perfect and holy. Our soul can never reach union with you, while we remain as humans. Perhaps our soul can merge with you after our death, but never while we live as humans. As long as our physical body exists, we cannot transcend it and reach oneness with you. We can utmost say that we have put on Christ or that Christ lives in me due the sacraments received by me". This kind of humility is indeed essential, before humans and before God, but it should not lead us to the trap of forgetting the goal, which has been set before us by God.

The incarnate Word demonstrated to the world how to discover our oneness (non-duality) with the Father, through our own true inner divine Self, by bringing our souls *(jiva)* into union (Yoga) with Him by a process of reformation or inner transformation. We interpret the mission of Jesus as an act of atonement for the one-time fault of our ancestor. The mission was indeed aimed at drawing the attention of all future generations to the necessity of purging the seeds of sinful traits *(vasanas)* in them, which are partly inherited from ancestors and partly self-cultivated, and to attain divinity or oneness with the Father. The mission of Jesus was designed to redeem the future generations from the clutches of their ignorance *(avidya)* or darkness of minds and to herald the reign of God, where everyone leads a life of purity of heart, in union with the Spirit.

## 7.0 Similarity of Attitudes Among Those Who Undergo Spiritual Experiences in Different Religions

According to one perception, people from different religions who undergo the highest-level of spiritual experience will have very similar attitudes. They will be extremely balanced and mature in their behaviour. They may not become angry and emotional. However, they may display anger and emotions externally when they lead to a beneficial outcome. They will be extremely humble and unselfish. They will be concerned more about others than about themselves. All their actions will be oriented such that the evolution of creation moves towards perfection and holiness (salvation).

Spiritually elevated persons have their own plans and ideas for future actions, but are fully prepared to change them according to the events that unfold before them. They are receptive to all eventualities and outcomes of actions and do not get perturbed under unfavorable or unexpected circumstances. They know only part of the divine plan in advance and are submissive to the divine will. They have fully surrendered themselves to their "inner voice", who they know to be the ultimate being who moves everything within the universe and even outside it. They are able to clearly distinguish their "inner voice" from their normal intellectual thought stream. They are also capable of subduing the latter in favour of the former. They believe that in a miniscule but special way they are shaping up the universe along with the ultimate Being, thus participating in His functions. They know that the ultimate Being who is present as their inner being is present everywhere, not only other human beings, but also in everything that exists.

The state of consciousness where one's inner being is merged in a non-dual manner with the whole of cosmos is called by some as the experience of cosmic Consciousness. Universal love is the outcome of such an experience. They find that there is no hatred towards anything or anyone. Such people see everything in the universe as the manifestation of the ultimate Being.

The perception that ideal followers of all religions ultimately reach the similar state of spiritual perfection can be illustrated with an example. Consider a house that has several rooms isolated from each other. each room represents a particular religious community, with their won unique staircase or method of salvation. The terrace represents salvation or enlightenment or attainment of heaven. The staircase represents the means to reach salvation. Christians are closeted in one room. They believe that the terrace is accessible only from their room. They believe firmly that the staircase in their room is the only way of attaining salvation. They offer worship to the staircase, but most of them do not realize that the staircase is to be utilized during their life on earth. They do not realize that each step in the staircase represents transformations required in the lifestyle practiced by them in the world. They believe that no amount of self-effort can take them to the terrace during their life on earth. They hope that they will be bodily taken to heaven after death by the grace of God if their faith in the staircase is firm. The effort to go to the terrace during their lifetime is curtailed by their ignorance or misunderstanding. But this is not the case with all of them. There are some of them who try to use the staircase or to grow in spirituality and attempt to reach the terrace. They are amply rewarded with spiritual wisdom or enlightenment during their life on earth. Christians who have experienced that their soul has merged or found communion with the Spirit realize that they have reached the terrace or the Kingdom of heaven, which was hidden within them so far. Such Christians who have reached the terrace may come across people from other religions that have reached the same terrace through different staircases. If they happen to enter into a spiritual dialogue, they will find that they are on the same level of spiritual maturity and that there are no differences to reconcile. This would have been unthinkable of while they were inside the four walls of the room. Such people experience the urge to coax the people in various rooms to fully utilize the staircases in their respective rooms, and to reach the terrace.

Various questions arise in the minds of Christians who are confronted with the perception that all religions are capable of providing similar experience of God to their followers. Which religion is the best? Is God experience enough to attain salvation? Is salvation effective without faith in Jesus?

## 8.0. Spirituality among the average Christians

According to one perception, one of the best religious traditions that motivates and guides its followers into the experience of the indwelling Spirit is the Advaita. One specialty of this philosophic tradition is that it does not insist on any doctrine, even though it provides symbolic or dogmatic concepts as initial guidance. It is a call for seeking, accessing and experiencing God directly within oneself and is very tempting for many Spiritual aspirants. This tradition offers no short cut to salvation such as faith in some facts or figures. Constant practice is recommended to purify the mind and intellect from all desires arising out of purely selfish motives. Several methods or combinations of methods such as devotion, selfless service and acquiring of Spiritual knowledge, etc. are recommended according to the temperament and intellectual level of individuals to achieve purity of mind, perfection and holiness. The aim is to attain conformity *(tadatmya)* of mind first with the object of devotion *(ishta devata)* and finally with the self (Spirit). The exhortation to experience oneness with the self through gradual purging of sinful tendencies *(vasana)* from the mind-body system is so clear and specific, that no one becomes unduly complacent about an assured salvation, until they experience it themselves.

According to another perception, Christianity is the best religion due to the following reasons. Through Jesus, we have received historical proof for the existence and nature of God. We also have a very practical model of life based on communion with God. We can shape our way of life based on the real-life model of Jesus. Oneness with others (neighbours) and living for others is shown to be the key to oneness with the Father in heaven. The importance of sacrificial way of life is highlighted. We are shown in real-life how we should prepare ourselves for facing rejection and crucifixion by others, even when we are right, and others are wrong. We are shown that such a life will be filled with peace, inner content and oneness with the Father in spite of all external adversities. We are shown how great is the responsibility of those who aim perfection and holiness to reform others or to become fishers of men. We are also shown through the life of Jesus how illusory is the worldly or external comforts and rewards and how sweet is the inner content and peace that ensues from practicing a life of perfection and holiness, in communion with God.

Even though Christians have such a great proof and model before us, we seem to have been spoiled like spoon-fed children. There is a perception that the average Christian does not understand the real message of Christ since he tries to grasp it literally. The average Christian is spiritually lethargic and complacent about his free salvation, which he gets as a bonus for his mere faith in Jesus. He feels that by virtue of his baptism, he is saved from eternal damnation. He hopes to get an opportunity to clean himself of his sins at his deathbed through sacrament of reconciliation, in order to go directly to heaven instead of purgatory or hell.

There is a perception that the average Christian is not aware about the concept of Spirituality and does not know what is meant by Spiritual growth. He counts on his sacraments for attaining salvation. He thinks that there is no need for self-efforts to attain perfection or holiness. According to him salvation accrues through the grace of God and not through 'works'. He thinks that it is enough if he keeps his faith in Jesus and if the sins are reconciled or whitewashed periodically through sacraments. He does not know that there is a need to gradually purge the roots of sins from our mind and body to approach perfection and holiness.

Let us explore how the perceptions of an average Christian are likely to evolve if he takes suitable steps for his Spiritual progress.

### 8.1. Stages of Perceptions during Spiritual Evolution

1) I am a Christian. I am saved. It is enough for me. I do not bother about others.
2) I am saved. I want to save others too by converting them to Christianity.

3) Christianity offers the only way of salvation. let me lead a Christian way of life to attain my salvation.
4) Leading a true Christian way of life is very difficult. I want to subdue my human desires that oppose my inner Spirit.
5) Now I have certain amount of control over my human nature. I am more and more being guided and influenced by my inner Spirit in my day-to-day life.
6) My true inner self or my indweller has almost taken control over my flesh and mind. This does not mean that I am a remotely controlled robot. It is through my own option and willingness that my indweller is controlling me. Temptations still continue to raise their horns and tails.
7) I have overcome my temptations. I have become one with the Spirit. I am a Spiritual being. My real nature is Spirit. My body is only an external manifestation or instrument that is to be used to do the will of the Spirit.

## 9.0. Summary

A comparison of Christian Trinitarian spirituality with Hindu advaitic spirituality may be useful, especially to a marginal cross section of Christians, who consider themselves to be the custodians of salvation, but at the same time are not aware about the need for Spiritual growth or transformation. The objective of this essay will be achieved if it prods and motivates a few Christians towards higher levels of Spirituality or to the experience of oneness with the Spirit hidden within themselves. Spirituality does not depend on the dogmatic or symbolic structures of any religious tradition. However, established concepts or doctrines indeed assist Spiritual aspirants in all religions into the experience of the ultimate Reality within a specific framework. The Biblical concept of Holy Trinity is such a framework. It is seen here in a new perspective. The second person is the eternal Word with a wider meaning than that of the incarnate Word. The holy Spirit, the Word and the Father are indivisible and inseparable from each other. However the division facilitates comprehension of various functions of the same Spirit. The holy Spirit *(Atman)* is perceived as the indweller of human beings, the Word *(Purusha)* as the indweller of the universe, and the Father or Eternal Spirit (Brahman) as the Spirit (Brahman) as the Spirit that dwells in humans and in the universe, transcending both.

The incarnate Word remained in perfect communion with the Eternal Spirit throughout His life on earth. His "Abba experience" or "oneness with the Father" indicates that His soul was dovetailed with the Father through the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian experience of Jesus is similar to that of the ancient Indian sages, who claimed oneness of their soul with the *Atman/Purusha/*Brahman at the height of their Spiritual transformation. Jesus can be thought of as a perfect model of advaitin. Ideal advaitins as well as ideal Christians are expected to reach Christ-like perfection and holiness through Spiritual transformation. This is not an impossible task; rather it is the right of every human being, and the aim of all Spiritual pursuits in all religions. Those who achieve this target of "oneness with the Father" are not to be crucified for blasphemy. All those who manage to reach that state of inner union or oneness with the eternal Spirit through various methods prescribed by their respective religions can share a common platform of Spirituality. They all participate in the reformation and progressive evolution of the world towards the reign of God on earth. The Spirit that enlightens all such people may prove to be the same. The new perceptions are getting clearer and stronger day by day, thanks to the bold and tireless spiritual quest pioneering theologians engaged in various forms of inter religious dialogue.

# THE INDIAN *GURU-SISHYA* TRADITION: A MODEL FOR TOMORROW

**Paul Palatty**[♦]

The master-disciple relationship is a phenomenon common to all religions and their mystical traditions. It can be regarded as the most universal and the most particular dyad[1]. A closer look may reveal that the figure of the Master and that of the disciple are interdependent and inseparable archetypes[2]. "A disciple is born when a true master is found, it is in turn the surrender of the disciple which makes the master[3]." In any ultimate religious experience, a radical self-surrender is seen as the indispensable condition[4]. The Master enables the disciple to express the surrender and the disciple becomes conscious of the surrender to a master. This is the core of the master-discipleship relationship.

In the ancient educational system of India, the teacher (*guru*) received the pupils (*chela* or *sishya*) in his own ashram or hermitage, where formation is given to them. The *chela* was to be very obedient to the *guru*, to work in the household of the *guru* and pay great reverence to him[5]. This reverence is to be paid to the *guru* as a spiritual parent. The

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[1] For an analysis of the Master-Disciple relationship in Hinduism and Christianity, Cf. C. Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism, Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation?*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 1991, 7-30. For a study of the various religious experiences in different religious tradition, Cf. W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Longmans and Green , 1952.

[2] Cf. C.G. Yung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

[3] Cornille, *The Guru*, 29.

[4] In monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the spiritual way is a way of asceticism and self-mortification: Cf. Cornille, *The Guru*, 11. Cf. Also, E. Underhill, *The Mystic Way*, London: J.M. Dent, 1913, 112; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chaphill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, 362; For the Spiritual masters role of guiding the disciple, see: L. Bouyer, Mysterion: *Du mysterre als mystique*, Paris: O.E.I.L., 1986.

[5] B. Walker, "*Guru*", in *Hindu World*, vol. 1, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharla Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1983, 419. It is *Chand. Up*. 8.15.1. that the term *guru* is seen as designation for a religious teacher. The *guru* is the centre of

pupil was prohibited to marry the daughter of the *guru*, as she becomes a sister in relationship with him as soon as he enters to the *guru-chela* relation. This amounts to a father-son relationship concerning his status with the *guru*. As the *guru* is regarded as a representative and the mediator of the divine powers; the disciples are subjected to him as if to God with an implicit obedience.[6]

## 1. The *Adiguru* and *Guru*

According to the ancient religious tradition, God is believed to be the founder of the particular order or religious sect and he is called the *adiguru*, the 'first *guru*' of the order. The existing *guru* is regarded as the embodiment of the founder-God and he is the last in the succession starting from the founder-God. As he is the successor of God himself, the deity incarnate, the salvation or *moksha* can be attained only through him[7]. When a *guru* dies, one of the disciples, initiated and selected by him, becomes the *guru*.[8]

The present *guru*, the successor-incarnate of the deity, is sometimes actually worshipped[9]. The devotees wave lights before him; burn incense in his presence; sing devotional songs and hymns and prostrate before him. Another form of showing devotion to the *guru* is *charana-puja*, 'foot-

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sacredness in the Hindu tradition. Cf. D. Miller, "The *guru* as the Centre of Sacredness", SR, 6/5, 1976-77, 527-533. The orthodoxy of tradition is seen in the valid tradition of *gurus*: X. Irudayaraj. "The *Guru* in Hinduism and Christianity", *Vidyajyothi* 34, 1975; Cf. Also, L. Renou, *Hinduism*, New York: Washington square, 1963; S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1922.

[6] J. Garrett, "*Guru*", *Classical Dictionary of India*, Jodhpur: Scientific Publishers, 1986, 236.

[7] *Mandu.Up*. 1.2.12 says "Nothing that is eternal (not made) can be gained by what is not eternal (made)".

[8] Walker, *Guru*, 419. The word *guru* comes from *'gu'*, which means 'darkness' and *'ru'* means 'dispeller' (Cf. *Avidya taraka Up*. 14-18). But some others think, that the literal meaning is 'weighty one' as the spiritual quality of the *guru*, is expressed in the measure of quantity. Cf. Heimann, *Facets*, 118.

[9] X. Irurdayaraj, The *Guru*, 338; The *guru* is to be seen as a God: "Let the teacher be unto thee like a God": *Taitti.Up*., 1.11.2; "To a high-minded man who feels the highest devotion for God, and his *guru* as God.." *Sveta. Up*. 6.23.

worship', by offering flowers and money at the feet of the *guru*. In certain instances, some kind of curious forms of reverence are said to be shown to the *guru*. The followers drink the water, by which the feet of the *guru* are washed; swallow the rest of the food materials such as fruit, betel, etc. chewed by the *guru*.[10]

The *guru* belongs to a class of priests, very clearly distinguished from the *purohitha*, who is a kind of domestic chaplain and usually married. The *guru* generally lives in celibacy, though some are married. Each cast or sect of the religious cult has its particular *guru*, belonging to the class of Brahmin or *Sudra*[11]. He is usually in charge of the cult, responsible for the observance of the traditions and rules of the community.[12]

When the people come to the presence of the *guru*, they venerate him with an action of *sashtanga*, i.e., 'prostration of the eight members'. The *guru*, in turn gives the *asirvada*, i.e., benediction, which can give, according to their belief, remission of sins[13]. The *guru*'s words, actions and even a look are considered powerful and efficacious. The *prasada*, or the present that the *guru* gives to the disciples, such as a little cow-dung ashes to smear on the forehead, flowers offered to idols, pieces from his meals, water in which he has washed his hands or feet, etc. are received by the disciples with reverence and belief of purifying the body and the soul. As the benediction of the *guru* is efficacious, his curse also is efficacious and powerful and believed to take its effect whether it is done justly or otherwise[14].

Generally, the *guru*s reside in some sort of monasteries or closed hermitages called *mathas*. The residence of the principal *guru* is known as

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[10] *Ibid.*, 419-20.

[11] Garret, *Guru*, 236.

[12] The laws of Manu are venerable laws of Hinduism and they regard the *guru* as Brahman: Cf. *Laws of Manu*, 2.226. Manu speaks of two types of teachers. 1. The *Upadhyaya*, who teaches only a part of the Vedas, for getting remuneration. 2. The *Acharya*, who is authorised to invest the student with the sacred thread, teaches the Vedas, *sastras* and the Upanishads without accepting money: 2.140-141.

[13] *Ibid.*, 236.

[14] *Ibid.*, 237.

*simhasana*, the throne and of the inferior, one is called *pitha*, seat[15]. The great *gurus* do not appear in public very often. Whenever, they do, it will be with big solemnity and splendour, seated at the back of an elephant, or in a rich palanquin. Some will have a guard of horse, with troops and arms, accompanied by great musicians and instruments, singers of his praises and odes. Incense and perfumes are burned; new clothes are spread before him on the road. Dancing girl and children accompany him. During this visit, fines and tribute are collected as *pada-kanika*, i.e. feet offerings. Sometimes the devotees are threatened with a curse, if they fail to pay the fines or the tributes, as they believe that the dishonouring of the *guru* is dreadful of the evil effects.[16]

In the Sikh religious tradition, the *guru* enjoys a much more elevated position.[17] In the history, they had ten successors as continuous heads of Sikhism. The tenth *guru* declared himself as the last one. Then onwards the Sikh Holy Book, the *Granth,* was delclared as the *Guru*. The Sikh venerates the '*Guru Granth'* with divine honour.

## 2. The Need of a *Guru*

The traditional belief is so particular to advocate that certain divine and important truths cannot be attained by ordinary learning of books or by independent, personal and intellectual reflection. They can be handed down only by gifted and inspired leaders[18]. Such esoteric divine truths of the cult can be transmitted only by persons who had been appointed by the deity to receive them in the first instance.

> The *guru* is the only living flame of such truth and he only can charge the unlit wick of the disciple duly dipped in the oil of cult teaching with the divine light. The secrets of the cult is 'stored' in the *guru*, and the mere formality of teaching these truths or uttering the

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[15] Garret, *guru*, 237.

[16] *Ibid*., 238.

[17] Walker, *Guru*, 420.

[18] The Upanishads speak of the indispensability of *guru*. Cf. *Mandu.Up.*, 1.2.12; *Taitti.Up*., 1.11.2; *Svet. Up*., 6.23.

words of a mantra will not convey enlightenment, unless done so by a *guru*. Practical initiation is thus impossible without a *guru*.[19]

In the cult practice and in the learning process, selection of proper *guru* is inevitable. Learning of meditative techniques, different *asanas*, sitting posters in meditation and contemplation, ancient Vedic and Upanisadic knowledge, etc. can be attained by the help of an experienced guidance of a *guru*.

### 3. The Initiation Rite (*Diksha*) of the Pupils

In the Vedas, the religious student is called *brahmacarin*, meaning 'one who walks in Brahman', the supreme God. In the Vedic society, the practice of religious studentship was developed and strictly regulated by rules.[20] The initiation to the religious education is called *diksha*, which is a religious rite to raise one from the 'profane to the sacred' level, sanctifying him for a special task. It opens the disciple to the special grace of God. The main duty of the *guru* is to impart the *diksha*. "...for a *guru* is one who has received *diksha* from one or more *gurus*, is capable of conferring and has actually conferred *diksha* on another person or persons. All other qualification ... spiritual maturity, age, renown, learning, etc. are marginal to guruhood.[21]

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[19] Walker, *Guru*, 419.

[20] R.V. X, 109 5; A.V. IV, 108,2; 133,3 The *Atharva Veda* (xi 5) gives characteristic features of the religious studentship. The pupil is initiated by the teacher in the a new life. He wears a antelope skin, and make his hair grow long (*Atharva Veda*, xi.5,6). He collects fuel for his master (A.V. xi.5, 4.6). he goes for begging for livelihood (A.V. xi.5, 9), learns and practices penance. The student lives in the house of the teacher (*acaryakula-vasin)* (Cf. *Chad.Up*. ii.23, 2; *Brah. Up*. Vi3, 15; *Taitt. Up*., i. 3,3; 11,2). He has to look after the sacrificial fires (*Chad. Up*. Iv.3,5) and tends the house (*Sathpatha Brahmana,* iii, 6,2,18). A *mantra* in the *Asvatayana Grhya Sutra,* i.22, 1.2., sums up the duties of the pupil as "thou art a *Brahmacarin;* eat water: perform thy duty; sleep not in the daytime; be obedient to thy teacher, study the Veda." A sepcial duty that is said was to guard the cattle; to bring the dried dung from the field for fuel and any available sticks. (Cf. *Aitayeya Arannayaka*, iii. 1,6; *Chand. Up*. Iv.5,5). Chastity was to be kept by the pupil probably due to the possibility of misconduct between a student and the wife of his preceptor. For the above information. Cf. Arthur Anthony Macdonnell and Arthur Berniedale Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol.II, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, 74-76.

Originally, the rite was for the solemn preparation of the *yajamana* (the sacrificer) for the Soma sacrifice and this *diksha* was personified as the wife of Soma. Later, the term popularly was used to denote the rite of initiation of a person into the mysteries of an esoteric order by his *guru*[22]. The knowledge is imparted in degrees depending on the spiritual growth of the disciple and he is asked to profess an oath that he will be keeping the mysteries of the sacred and secret wisdom and would not reveal it to the non-initiated public. The candidate, to become a true disciple, *chela*, has to undergo a rigorous process of renunciation (*vairagya*), discernment (*viveka*), freeing from al the egoism (*ahamkara*), a total dedication or surrender (*sraddha*) by removing all kinds of material desires and family bonds and by controlling the whole body.

The initiation ceremony is preceded by "a vigil and fast", when the candidate shows his 'imperfect' state by stammering when he speaks, limping when he walks, keeping the last three fingers of his left hand clenched in his fist till he appears before the *guru* for the ceremony.[23]

The different stages of the rite of *diksha* are the following.[24] 1. A rite of prayer and homage to the *guru* by the candidate. 2. A test of the knowledge of the sectarian doctrines of his powers of endurance, of his devotion to the *guru,* etc. 3. A fire ceremony in which symbolic funeral ceremonies over the candidate, is performed. 4. The *abhisheka* or aspersion of the candidate with consecrated water by the *guru* to purify him. 5. A test of the candidate's proficiency in the practical teachings of the sect, e.g., the technique of sitting in a particular *asana,* posture; breathing exercises, relaxation, harnessing the mind, concentration, mediation and worship. 6. Finally, the whispering into the ears of the candidate, the *rahasya* (secret doctrine) or the *mantra* (magic formula) of the cult, through which, as believed by the tradition, power and enlightenment, appropriate for his grade is communicated to him in a flash.

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[21] A. Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1975, 186.

[22] B. Walker, "Initiation", in *Hindu World*, Vol.I, 485-486.

[23] *Ibid*., 486.

[24] *Ibid*.486.

The initiate of the sect is considered superior to the uninitiated public in the *Tantrik* tradition; he is called *vira* or hero, as different from the *pasu* or the common herd of people[25]. The master-disciple relationship of Advaita tradition is presented in Sankara's *Upadesasahasri*, or *Thousand Teachings.* The *guru*-disciple relationship is institutionalized by the foundation of four monasteries or *mathas* in the four directions: *Sringerimatha* in the South, *Govardhanamatha* in the East, *Saradmatha* in the West and *Jyothirmatha* in North and the creation of orders or *darshanas*[26]. The disciple should be "dispassionate toward all things non-eternal[27]", one who has "abandoned the desire for sons, wealth and world and reached the state of *paramahamsa* wandering ascetic[28]", and one who has "tranquility, self-control, and compassion[29]". Service and obedience to the *guru* are also essential qualities of the disciples.

## 4. Characterization of *Guru-Sishya* in Bhagavad Gita

The very setting of the book of the *Gita* is the relationship between the supreme Master Krishna and the Indian ideal disciple Arjuna at a critical point of battle between Pandavas and Kauravas. It is symbolic of a critical moment of seeking true direction and guidance to attain victory over the evil and *mukti* or salvation from the bondage of ignorance and sin.

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[25] *Ibid.*, 486.

[26] Cf. S. Mayeda, trs., *A Thousand Teachings, The Upadesashasri of Sankara*, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press 1979. For an analysis of the Master-Disciple relationship in the *Thousand Teachings of Sankara* Cf. Cornille, The *Guru*, 41-49. It consists of a metrical part as a textbook for the disciples and a prose part as a guide for the teachers, explaining the means of final liberation.

[27] S. Mayeda, *Thousand Teachings,* 2.1.2.

[28] *Ibid.*, 2.1.2. P.V. Kane describes how the ascetics are classified as *kuticaka*, who can beg only from his sons; *bahudaka*, who can beg from Brahmins and upper class; *hamsa*; who are allowed to beg from village people and *Paramahamsa*, who begs from all casts of people. Cf. *History of Dharmasastra,* II, Poona: Oriental Research Institute, 1974, 930-31.

[29] S. Mayda, *Thousand Teachings*, 2.1.2; "This supreme Knowledge should not be given to a student who is not tranquil but should be taught to a student who is dispassionate and obedient", *Ibid.*, 1.17.85. Cf. Also *Brihad. Up.* 4.4.23.

At the battlefield Arjuna, who is perplexed by the thought of waging war against his relatives, teachers and other noble men, says to Krishna, the charioteer of Arjuna: "My nature is weighed down with the tint of feeble mindedness; my understanding is confused as to duty. I am your disciple. Do instruct me who have taken refuge in you" (B,G, II.7).

The characters of the *guru* and the disciple are vivid and alive throughout the narratives of Gita, which contains the supreme insights and spiritual depth of Indian discipleship and spirituality. This thought leads me to look into the vision of Gita on the characterization of the ideal disciple and an ideal *guru*.

### 4.1. Characterization of a *Guru* in the *Bhagavad Gita*

In the *Gita* the supreme master is Krishna, the God-incarnate, to establish supreme righteousness. He appears as an ideal teacher, who comes down to the human level to teach the divine and the human understandings of the realities encountered in life. It is a way of life and knowledge that he imparts to every man who seeks an answer to the real problems of life.

#### 1) He is the teacher of Eternal Truths

He is the incarnate God and endowed with divine powers. He teaches that He is the Lord of everything and dwells in all beings (B.G. XVIII. 61; X.20) in everything (II.17; IX.4) and everywhere (VI.30). Everything originates from Him (VII. 10; X.20) and he is the end of all (IX. 18; X.20). He is the life-giver of all beings (VII.9; XV.14). Since he is the absolute God he can, and only he can, teach the eternal truths.

#### 2) He is a Personal and Loving Teacher

He establishes a personal and loving relationship with his disciple. It is a symbol of God-man relationship, coming down to the level of man to establish a relationship with him. He calls Arjuna, "beloved" and "steadfast of heart", which expresses a human loving relationship. "Listen again to My supreme word, the profoundest of all. You are beloved of Me and steadfast in heart; therefore, I shall tell what is your good" (B.G. XVIII.64). Krishna is pictured as a God, who loves the mankind. The phrase "man is dear to me" appears several times in the *Gita*. He is the

Incarnate God to redeem man. His devotees find a special place in his heart, and all those seek a refuge, find grace and mercy in Him (XII.14-20). The human metaphors used of loving relationship such as, "father and the son", "friend and friend" "a lover and his beloved" are expressions of personal loving relationship towards man (B.G. XI.44).

He is a God of impartial love and equality of its expression. Lord Krishna opens man's eye to see a Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcast with the same consideration. (B.G. V.18). He wants us to treat the friends and enemies, saints and sinners with the same scale. (B.G. VI.9). He is the saviour of the world and of the individuals, out of His compassion and love[30]. He is a God of mutual and reciprocal love. "In whatsoever way devoted men approach Me,in the same way do I return their love" (BG. IV.II).

Another important aspect of the love of Lord Krishna, as depicted in the *Gita*, is its saving power. To every disciple, He shows His saving love by His presence and deliverance. He says "no devotee of Mine is ever lost" (B.G. IX. 31). His words are so consoling and loving to all those who are suffering, He is depicted as the saviour of the devotees. He is a refuge to all and a deliverer from all the evils of world. "I promise you truly, for you are dear to me. Give up all things to the law, turn to Me, your only refuge. I will deliver you from all evils, have no care" (BG. XVIII.56f).

The teacher in the *Gita* is a divine Master, a true model of a teacher, who can lead every disciple to the fullness of knowledge, to the real goal of life. He is also an example of sharing his own life and love to redeem every disciple in the divine and human spheres of his life.

### 4.2. Characterization of Disciples in the *Gita*

According to K.D. Bharadwaj, 'a disciple is one who is intoxicated with God-consciousness, singing his glory, contemplating him and immersed in his worship'.[31] God becomes the father, mother, friend and the son, the learning and the wealth of the true disciple.[32] He is truly dedicated to the divine tasks. The *Gita* puts forward certain characteristics of a true disciple.[33]

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[30] R. De Smet, "The Integrative doctrine of the Bhagavad Gita", in C.M. Vadakkekara, ed., *Prayer and Contemplation*, Bangalore: Asirvanam, 1980, 156f.

[31] K.D. Bharadwaj, *The Philosophy of Ramanuja*, New Delhi: Sir Sankar Hall Charitable Trust Society, 1958, 168.

### 1) Exclusive Dedication to the Master

An exclusive and total dedication and commitment of deep love and trust are demanded of the disciple. "Fix your mind on Me; be devoted to Me; Sacrifice unto Me; bow down to Me. Having thus make yourself steadfast in me. Taking Me as the Supreme Goal" (BG. IX.34). "Fix your mind on Me alone; Let your thoughts dwell in Me. You will hereafter live in Me alone" (B.G. XII. 8).[34] When a *bhakta* prays and worships with undivided heart, God's presence is experienced everywhere.

### 2) The Duty-consciousness (*svadharmavabodha*)

The great and the central theme of the *Gita* is performance of one's own duty or dharma without low level intentions. Everybody is destined by God to do the duties assigned to him. Krishna, the master, instructs Arjuna, his disciple to do his duties as a devotion to God. A *bhakta* is expected to do the duties assigned to him without any selfish desires.[35] If somebody discards his duty, it shall be a sin.[36] Performing the duty is equal to offer worship to God, because the fruit of the actions ultimately go to God and it is the way to attain union with God.[37]

### 3) The *Bhakta*, an Instrument in the Hands of the *Guru*

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[32] Cf. B.G. IX, 17.

[33] There are four types of disciples according to the *Gita:* the *artha* or the afflicted on; the *jijnasuh*, the inquiring one; the *artharthi*, the desirous of wealth and the possessor of knowledge or the *bhakta*. Cf. B.G. VII,16.

[34] Cf. Ramanuja, *Gitabhasya*, 12: 6-7. He says that this exclusiveness is attained by meditating on Him with exclusive devotion. There are many places in the *Gita*, where this attitude of the *bhakta* is denoted: Cf. B.G. VIII. 14; 22; IX. 13; XIII, 10 etc.

[35] S. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, 488.

[36] Swami Chinmayananda, *The Holy Gita*, Bombay: Sri Ram Bhakta Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 89.

[37] P. Satwalekar, "Karma Yoga", *Studies in the Gita,* ed. M.D. Paradkar, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970, 11-15.

The total self-surrender of the disciple makes him as an instrument in the hands of the *guru*. Arjuna, the model of the true *Bhakti*, surrenders himself to Krishna, even the control of his life, symbolized by making the *Guru* to drive his chariot. Then everything becomes controlled by God, as an instrument in the hands of God. The moment we cease to be conscious of being the doer of our actions, we will be freed from the illusion of self. Because, our longing to be the subject of our actions exist only as an illusion.[38]

## 4) Total Surrender to the Will of the Master

A true disciple totally surrenders his reason to the enormous knowledge of God. R. Panikkar says, 'action belongs to the absolute necessity of man and of God. Maintaining the world and sustaining the life of man are the constant activity of God, who cannot cease to be active even for a moment'[39]. A total surrender of the disciple to the supreme Master of his life, with a true devotion and unselfishness, enables the supreme God to indwell in him and act in and through him. According to the *Gita*, when a man totally surrenders his will the supreme Master, he not only surrenders his right to action, but also the fruits of his actions. The actions of a true *bhakta* should be unselfish and devoid of hope for any reward. As S. Chinmayananda puts it, one must fight in the silent battle of life, with unselfish motivations. Such an unselfishly motivated life, in the hands of the Lord, will lead to the feeling that "I am the Supreme".[40]

The *Gita* pictures Arjuna as an ideal disciple of Krishna, to whom he has totally dedicated everything in his life, and is totally controlled by Him alone. Here he loses all self-interests. The Lord who dwells in Him is a God in the hearts of all the beings (B.G. XVIII.61).

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[38] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, Mangalore: Sri Rama Krishna Ashram, 1969, 32f. to think oneself as the doer of actions comes from ignorance and pride: Cf. B.G. III. 27. XIII.29. It is by giving oneself totally to the hands of the Master, he can be freed from the sense of the doer.

[39] R. Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, London: Longman and Todd, 1977, 425f.

[40] S. Chinmayananda, *The Bhagavat Gita*, Thiruparaithura: Sri Ramakrishna tapovanam, 1982, 194-195.

### 5) A Disciple is a Man of Sacrifice (*Yajna*)

The action or the *karma* of man should be seen as a sacrifice to be offered so that he is freed from the bondage of sin. The suffering undertaken for an action in the life of a *bhakta* or the *yajna* should be motivated by unselfishness. The fundamental basis of the *Yajna* is the example of God Himself, who was involved in an *yajna* during His creative and sustaining activities[41]. Only sacrifice can break the law and the sin, can free one from all bondage (B.G. IV.23) and can lead to the true knowledge of God (B.G. IV.24).

According to Chinmayananda, a true disciple or a *bhakta* is the one who performs the work assigned to him, the *karma,* as a sacrifice or *Yajna*. He defines *Yajna* as "self-sacrificing work undertaken in a spirit of self-dedication, for the blessing of all"[42]. The *Gita* does not advocate a pure contemplative or ascetic life, devoid of all actions. At the same time, actions devoid of any contemplation and asceticism are seen as futile.[43] We may say a spiritualized dynamic active life is best suited for a disciple.

### 6) A Disciple- a Man of Renunciation of Desire for Fruits o his Actions (*phal thrshna vairagya*)

The disciple has usually two duties to perform. A) the duties of his state of life or the *svadharma* and b) the duties of his religious state, i.e., sacrificial obligations.[44] These are entrusted to him by the Supreme and he has to perform it with selfless motivation (*niskama karma*) and with a motive of abandoning the fruits of the action (*karma phala tyaga*) (B.G. VI.I; XVIII. 2.6.). The *Gita* does not see renunciation (*samnyasam*) as a life of inaction (*naiskarmya*). It does teach salvation (*mukti*) can be attained only by disinterested action.

A true disciple is interested to do his duties as a commitment and not as a man longing for rewards. His involvement in action is not an entanglement with the world. As his heart is situated in the supreme reality, he is able to enjoy "a holy indifference", serenity, and peace.[45] Then he is led to a higher attitude of *Nirahankara* the elimination of ego-sense and it frees him from the bondage of action itself.[46] Then he becomes a completely God-centred man, unattached to action and its fruits and freed from the bondage of sin and egoism. This complete God-centredness is termed *mayi sarvani karmani samnyasya* and is the supreme offering and sacrifice or *yajna* to God.

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[41] Cf. Pnikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 443f.

[42] Chinmayananda, *Holy Gita*, 169.

[43] B.G. III. 8;27.

[44] Cf. B.G. XVIII. 41; B.G. II; B.G. XVI.15.

It leads the disciple to a state of equanimity or *samatva*, by a subjective sameness regarding the joys and sorrows, praise and accusations and other contradictory human experiences; by an objective sameness, regarding people as good, bad or indifferent; friend, enemy or indifferent and by a transcendence called *gunatita*, in which he is not disturbed by nothing of the worldly things.[47]

In turn the disciple is led to brahmanhood, a stage in which he transcends all the bodily and the worldly attachments of the three-fold *gunas*, gets freed from birth, death, old age and sorrow and attains *moksa*, immortality.[48]

### 7) A Disciple, a Man of True Vision and Knowledge (*Jnanin*)

A detached man with devotion and commitment will be endowed with knowledge, true and genuine. Here the knowledge becomes the supreme instrument of relationship with the supreme Reality and the *bakta* becomes aware of the fact that there is nothing greater than knowledge. It is from the deep communion with the divine that the knowledge is attained and by this knowledge, one reaches God. (B.G. XVIII.50) and He removes the darkness of ignorance with the light of His divine knowledge (B.G. X.10). It is the loving devotion or *bhakti* with which a devotee approaches God, as he is, that enables him to attain true knowledge. This true knowledge is the knowledge of God "as I am" (B.G. XVIII. 55).

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[45] Panikkar, *Vedic Experience*, 443f.

[46] G.W. Kaveeshawar, *The Ethics of the Gita*, Delhi:1971, 10-11.

[47] Dasgupta, *Indian Philosophy*, 511f.

[48] *Ibid.*, 512f.

### 8) A disciple, who attains Union with God (*Yogin*)

A disciple becomes a *yogin*, when he has attained a supreme *para-bhakti*, an advanced communion of love, with the Supreme, through his devotion. Kriŝhna asks Arjuna to become a *yogin*. "The *yogin* is superior to the performers of austere penance, and is considered to be superior even to the performers of religious rites also. Therefore, O! Arjuna, do you become a *yogin*" (B.G. VI.46).

The characterization of the *yogin* in the *Gita* is noteworthy. He is essentially different from all other men. He is simply drawn to God (B.G. XIV.15). He loves and is absorbed in God (B.G. VII.47) and comes to a stage of likeness with God (B.G. XIV.2) and attains a knowledge of God as he is (B.G. XVIII.55) and gets united with him in a supreme contemplation. According to *Gita*, it is a mystic stage, where he enjoys absolute bliss, peace and tranquility, reaching above all bodily and worldly pleasures and identifying himself with the divine.

## 5. The *Guru-Chela* and the Jesus-Disciple Relationships

The religious character of the whole process of discipleship in the *guru-chela* system is striking. There appears at first sight great resemblance to the discipleship of Jesus, in many of the areas, though there are differences, which are explicit. The personal orientation of the disciples to the person of the *guru* as the deity incarnate, the divine succession of the *guru* from a God, the insistence on celibate life for the *guru*, the idea of the *guru* as the spiritual parent who dispels darkness and the vehicle of divine powers, etc. are points of great resemblance. The absolute need of the *guru*, especially for salvation, the concept of the *ādiguru* (a God who is the founder of the order), the worship of the *guru* as the living flame of the divine truth, the belief that only the *guru* has the 'secrets of the sect' and hence he only can initiate the disciples to divine enlightenment, etc. are also similar to the Christian idea of the Master. The *chela* at the service of the *guru*; the insistence on the need of renunciation, discernment and total surrender; the practice of 'vigil and fast', prayers, the symbolic funeral function over the candidate to signify that he is dead to the world; the test of the knowledge, powers of endurance, devotion to the *guru*, etc. the concept of the superiority of the disciples over the rest of the 'world'; the effectiveness of the actions (looks, words, curses and blessings) of the *guru*; the extra-ordinarily divine and solemn respect and veneration that the *guru* demands from the disciple (e.g. the *sashtanga*, the prostration of the eight members), the appointment of the successor of the order by the *guru* from his disciples previously selected by him; the *pada-kanika*, the feet offering, as a sign of reverence to the *guru*, the public reception of the *guru* by singing his odes and praises, spreading the clothes on the road, procession on the back of an animal (here an elephant), etc. are also the various similarities that can be detected when we study both comparatively.

A few existential and novel differences make the discipleship with Jesus something unique in the world. Jesus Christ, for Christians is the Absolute teacher, the only one incarnate God, with no parallel. On the contrary, the Hindu system admits many incarnate deities, and so many *ādigurus*, depending on different orders of the cult, with no uniformity. In Hinduism, the characteristics of he disciple differ from *guru* to *guru* and from cult to cult. The characteristics of Jesus-disciple relationship is unique and the same anywhere in the world. Another difference can be the initiative of Jesus and the freedom, by which he calls the disciples, where as in Hindu tradition, the disciples select the *guru*.

## 6. A Search for the Soul of India

If we want to search for the soul of India, we must search in the ashrams, especially in the ancient ashrams of India[49]. In the opening scene of Bhasa's *Svapna-vasavadatta*, the dramatist narrates the natural qualities of an ashram. It is a place where the deers move without fear, the trees carry plenty of flowers and fruits, the brown cows yield plenty of milk and smoke rising from many alters into the sky. The ashrams cultivated an eco-friendly atmosphere, with non-violence and affection, solitude and silence, feeling of the sublime and the transcendent, hospitality and love and a synthesis of *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *karma*. Religious atmosphere of the ashrams was praiseworthy[50]. Every ashram was illumined by the personal charm and sublime ideals of the *guru*. The *guru-sishya* relationship was the fundamental institution of the ashram, it was through this institution the noble ideas, and sublime knowledge of the Absolute were transmitted from generation to generation.

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[49] According to Kalidasa, an *ashram* is a place of serenity and peace, calm and solitude: "*shantam idam ashramamapadam*" (Cf. *Shakunthalam*, 1, 16). The term ashram comes from "ā" + "śram", to mean (1) 'no fatigue', 'no weariness', when it is interpreted, *ā* = to or opposite to, and *śram* = effort, penance, discipline, etc. In this sense it means, a place of rest and peace. It can also mean a place of penance, self-discipline or *tapas*. Here the 'a' means great or big. Thus, ashram is a place of asceticism and peace.

The ashrams were centers of learning, both spiritual and religious, cultural and social. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, the spiritual epic, and the *Abhijnana-sakuntalam* of Kalidasa, the great dramatic *kavya,* came from their ashram experience..[51] The Krishna and Kuchela were educated in the *Gurukula* tradition of the ashram of Rishi Sandipani.

As the *Taittiriya Upanisad* 1,2,2 points out, the ashram was a place, where guests are not only welcome, but also considered as representatives of God himself. The slogan was *atithi devo bhava*, let a guest be God to you. Bandhu Ishanand remembers how

> The ancient ashrams were not surrounded by barbed wires or walls. Not even wild animals felt threatened by the ashram structures... The ashram spoke silently about the ideals of the then society and they remained not only as models but also sources of energy for living these ideals. Kings and nobles, sinners and outcasts, poor and the sick flocked to the ancient ashrams, and all were welcomed warmly.[52]

They were examples of hospitality. The ashramites were "a tender, loving and cheerful lot: very hospitable to the guests, caring and sharing among themselves, and compassionate to the needy and the suffering. The rituals, austerities and life in solitude do not make them unhappy".[53]

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[50] B. Ishanand, "Ashrams and Mission Spirituality", *Third Millennium*, II, 1999, 2. 131-136.

[51] 'The sharp stones with the shells of nuts near them, the deer calmly and fearlessly walking around, the wet lines of the drops of water on the path from the clothes (the *valkala*), the smoke rising to the air from the sacrificial fire, are the signs of an ashram nearby' (Cf. *Sakuntalam*, 1,1-18).

[52] Ishanand, "Ashrams", 135.

[53] *Ibid.*, 135.

## 7. A Changed Vision for the Master-Disciple Tradition

We all know that the fundamental institution, the source of the ideals and ideologies of a community, is the formation centre, where the disciples are formed according to the vision and teaching of the master, in whose name the community is established. We also know discipleship belongs to the fundamental criteria of a genuine community. It follows without telling that it is necessary to reorganize the master-disciple tradition according to the pattern of the great *guru*, Jesus Christ, and in the context of the great Indian ashramite ideals, which we may have neglected through the past centuries. We are also far away from a possibility of a dialogue with our neighbours, who cherish a long history of ancient Indian spirituality and asceticism, when we still depend on alienated and "stitched-together" forms of our ideals and their expressions in our religious and social levels.

## Conclusion

India has a rich heritage of a *guru-sishya* tradition, with lots of genuine spiritual and social insights that echo a similar ethos as that of Christianity. The ideals and ideologies of this rich tradition are not antiquated, though the ancient forms of their expression are no more valid in the modern world. The great spiritual values of the divine relationship with the Absolute and a mature spiritual outlook to the daily life, the great human and social values of hospitality, the human warmth, care and love for the poor and the suffering, the impartial and unselfish motives of relationship with all people, and above all, the expression of happiness on the face and in the heart, are to be restored in master-disciple tradition. It must convey to the world that a *sishya* of Christ lives up to the ideals of the master and makes the people follow the same path. It must be put in an Indian context and form, valid to the modern man. The *guru-sishya* tradition of India and the rich spiritual and social values of Indian ashrams can be a model for the third millennium.

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*Survey*

# AN INDIAN POET CONTEMPLATES ON THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

## A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF THE KRISTU-BHAGAVATA OF PROF. P.C. DEVASSIA

**Augustine Thottakara**[◆]

### 1. Introduction

Jesus Christ is an Asian. He was born in Asia; he lived his thirty-three years of embodied existence, preached his message of love and salvation, died on the Cross and resurrected to life again in the Asian soil. All the world religions, in fact, took origin and grew strong in Asia. Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Islam and Sikhism: all these are products of Asia. No other continent, I presume, can claim to be the birth place of a world religion, with written foundational sacred texts, organized and systematized liturgical worship, precisely prescribed belief system, a definite founder whose inner spiritual experience gives the inspiration and basis to a particular religious tradition, and defined doctrines concerning the ultimate eschatological good of human existence. One may argue that some of the above-mentioned systems are not proper religions, but are only ways of life with a well-defined moral code and time-tested principles for orderly societal life. They are meant to ameliorate the earthly sojourn of humans through prescribed ethical principles and precepts for correct moral behaviour. This may depend how one defines religion. One thing is certain: religious traditions, principles, doctrines and practices have exerted and exert today immense influence on the life and activities of Asians. Christianity, though born in Asia, due to historical and geographical vicissitudes and reasons, spread to the West. In the course of time Christianity was identified and categorized as a western religion, and had to be re-introduced in many of the Asian countries. Unfortunately this re-introduction was wrongly conceived, irrationally planned and ruthlessly executed. Christ was presented to the Asians as if he were a European,

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clothed in the European socio-cultural garb, and Christian message was preached to the Asians in European cultural and philosophical framework and terminology. I am trying here to delineate how an Indian poet tries to recapture Christ as an Asian, as an Indian.

My intention here is to study and evaluate the *mahākāvya* of Prof. P.C. Devassia entitled *Kristu-bhāgavata.* Prof. Devassia is a committed Catholic from Kerala, and the Indian Christians can rightly be proud that one among them has secured the noble title and high honour of a Sanskrit *mahākavi.* Before I enter into the discussion on this epic poem, let me, by way of introduction, say a few words about the Kerala Christians' contribution to Sanskrit literature. The history of the Christians in Kerala, as is well known, goes back to the first century CE. It is believed Christianity came to India immediately after the death of Jesus Christ, its founder, through the ministry of his apostle St. Thomas. The Christians in Kerala has totally integrated and easily merged into the main stream life of the Kerala society. This first Christian community of India, known today as the Thomas Christians, in the beginning accepted the caste structure of the Hindu society and lived as a particular caste community. In the societal life they accepted most of the Hindu caste customs and traditions. They were vegetarians; they dressed like high caste Hindus.

### 1.1. The First Christian Sanskrit School

During the nineteenth century, a sort of Christian renaissance was initiated in Kerala mainly through the efforts of a local Catholic priest called Kuriakose Elias Chavara (1805-1871). He was a religious and social reformer, a brilliant educationalist, a great litterateur, a promoter of inter-religious understanding, and above all, a very holy man. The Keralites have to be grateful to this priest, because, the high literacy rate Kerala enjoys today is largely due to the interest taken by him to establish schools all over Kerala[1]. He also started a Sanskrit school in 1846 in Mannanam. This is the first ever-recorded attempt by a Christian to propagate Sanskrit education in Kerala. This school was open to all, irrespective of castes, classes and sexes. In 1996 CMI Congregation celebrated the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the first Christian Sanskrit School in Kerala. But this institute did not survive long. One reason for its early demise might have been the objection raised by the caste Hindus. Caste system was extremely strong and virulent in Kerala at that time. "Kerala is a mad-house of castes", said Vivekananda. The high caste Hindus believed that the Christians were not gifted to engage in literary and artistic creativity. A Sanskrit school run by Christians, which is open to all, even to outcastes, might have been a blasphemous challenge for the all-powerful Hindu leadership. They might have prevented its progress by all means. However, it is a matter of great satisfaction that the members of the religious community established by Kuriakose Elias Chavara, today a very powerful Christian organization of Kerala, are keen on learning and propagating Indian culture, Sanskrit language and in promoting inter-religious understanding through dialogue[2].

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[1] Fr Kuriakose Elias Chavara was the head (Vicar General) of the Christian community of Kerala for some years. Using his authority he ordained that every parish community should establish a school attached to the church. He saw to it that his orders are carried out by local priests.

In this century another Sanskrit College was established by another Christian, namely, by Prof. P.T.Kuriakose, commonly known as *Kuriakose Master*. He started a school in 1909 at Pavaratty which was later (in 1932) developed into a Sanskrit College, recognized (in 1937) by the University of Madras. All the teachers of this college were well-known Hindu Sanskrit scholars. Prof. Kuriakose also wrote and published a widely used Sanskrit textbook in five volumes. In 1973 he handed over this Sanskrit College with all its assets to the *Kendrīya Vidyā-pīṭha* of the Government of India[3].

## 1.2. Christian Sanskrit Literature

There are a few Sanskrit works written by Kerala Christians, which are worthy of mention. Prof. I.C.Chacko, who lived in the beginning of this century, an engineer by profession, was an acknowledged Sanskrit scholar. His *Pāṇinīya-Pradyota*, a well-written Malayalam commentary to the *sūtras (Aṣṭādhyāyi)* of Panini, won for him the *National Sāhitya Academy Award* of 1956 *for displaying high scholarship in Sanskrit language*[4]. He has also composed *Kristu-Sahasra-Nāma*, the *One Thousand Names of Christ*, in Sanskrit. Imitating the *Viṣṇu-Sahasra-Nāma* of Hinduism, he wrote this devotional work in verses[5]. Another *Sahasra-Nāma* hymn entitled *Miśihasahasra-Nāma-Stotra* is recently published by another young Christian scholar named K.U.Chacko[6]. Besides the thousand names of Christ, this small book also contains *Kristvaṣṭottaraśata-Nāma-Stotra* and *Mariāṣṭottaraśata-Nāma-Stotra*.

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[2] Courses on Sanskrit, Indian Philosophy and Hindu Spirituality are compulsory items in the curriculum of priestly studies of the CMI order. In fact, there are eminent scholars in Sanskrit language and Indian Philosophy among the members of this order. A number of Centres and Institutes are manned and managed by the CMI Order all over India to promote Indian culture and inter-religious dialogue.

[3] Later the government of India shifted this Sanskrit College from Pavaratty to Puranattukara.

Prof. K.P.Urumese is also known for his Sanskrit scholarship. Based on Christ's *Sermon on the Mount* he composed a monograph in Sanskrit verse, entitled *Girigītā*[7]. Another short Sanskrit work also deserves mention here, namely, *Yeśucarita* written in prose by Fr Marcel, who was professor of Sanskrit at SH College, Thevara, Ernakulam[8]. It is a work on the life of Christ based on the four Gospels[9].

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[4] I.C.Chacko, *Pāṇinīya-pradyotam*, Ernakulam: Mar Thimotheus Memorial Printing and Publishing House, 1955.

[5] I.C.Chacko, *Kristusahasra-Nāma. Thousand Names of Christ*, Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1985.

[6] K.U.Chacko, *Miśihasahasra-Nāma-Stotra*, Muvattupuzha: Jeeva Jyothi Publications, 1987.

[7] K.P.Urumese, *Girigītā*, Trivandrum: St Joseph's Press, $1978^2$.

[8] Fr Marcel, *Yeśucarita*, Cochin-Thevara: L.F.Printing Press, $1957^2$.

[9] Mention may be made here also of the short Sanskrit work by Prof. K.P. Narayanpisharoti, a Hindu scholar, entitled *Mahātyāgi*. This however, is a translation of the Malayalam work by the same name composed by a Kerala Christian Vidvān M.O. Avara. This poetic work treats the last words of Jesus Christ on the cross. Cf. K.P. Naryanapisharoti, *Mahātyāgi*, in Vidvan M.O. Avara, *Mahātyāgi. Christ on the Cross. Malayalam Poem with six Translations*, Cochin: Amarakerala Industries, 1978.

There are also numerous short hymns and bhajans in Sanskrit which are used widely in Christian churches.

## 2. Kristu-bhāgavata of Prof. P.C. .Devassia

### 2.1. Introduction

The greatest contribution of Christians to Sanskrit literature is ***Kristu-bhāgavata***, a *mahākāvya* in thirty-three chapters *(sarga)* based on the life of Jesus Christ, composed by **Prof. P.C.Devassia**[10]. The thirty-three chapters correspond to the thirty-three years of life of Jesus Christ[11].

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[10] P.C.Devassia, *Kristu-bhāgavata*, Trivandrum: Jayabharatam, 1977.

Prof P.C.Devassia, born in 1906 at Kudamalore, Kerala, had his Sanskrit education in the traditional way under several well-known Sanskrit scholars. He took his Master's Degree in Malayalam and Sanskrit from the University of Madras in 1937, and since then had been lecturer and professor of Malayalam at several colleges of Kerala. He has published several works in Malayalam and Sanskrit. But his most important work is undoubtedly the *Kristu-bhāgavata*. He now leads a retired life in Trivandrum.

[11] The thirty-three chapters of the poem are: I. *Kanyā-darśanam* (The Sage Meets the Virgin), II. *Pratiśruti* (The Betrothal), III. *Sakharyasya divya-darśanam* (The Vision of Zachariah), IV. *Maṅgala-vijñāpanam* (The Annunciation), V. *Bandhu-grahābhigamanam* (The Visitation), VI. *Janmadeśa-gamanam* (A Journey to Bethlehem), VII. *Bhagavato yeśor avatārah* (The Birth of Jesus), VIII. *Devalaya-samarpaṇam* (The Presentation in the Temple), IX. *Vidvad āgamanam herodakṛtam śiśusmāraṇam ca* (The Arrival of Magi and the Slaughter of the Innocents), X. *Yeśoh śaiśavam* (The Childhood of Jesus), XI. *Snāpakayohanasyāgamah* (The Coming of John the Baptist), XII. *Piśācasya pralobhanam yeśoh śiṣyavaraṇam ca* (The Temptation and the Call of the Disciples), XIII. *Vivāhotsave bhagavatah prathamādbhutam* (The Marriage Feast at Cana and the First Miracle), XIV. *Samariayāṅgana-vṛttāntah* (Jesus and the Samaritan Woman), XV. *Adbhuta-paramparā* (Jesus Works Many Miracles), XVI. *Anyādbhutāni dvādaśa-śiṣyavaraṇam ca* (More Miracles. The Selection of the Apostles), XVII. *Giri-prabhāṣaṇam* I (The Sermon on the Mount I), XVIII. *Giri-prabhāṣaṇam* II (The Sermon on the Mount II), XIX. *Snāpakayohanasya vadhah* (The Execution of John the Baptist), XX. *Magdalenāyās tailābhiṣekah* (The Story of Mary Magdalene), XXI. *Sādhoh samariyasya dṛṣṭāntah* (The Parable of Good Samaritan), XXII. *Durvyayinah sutasya kathā* (The Prodigal Son), XXIII. *Gaṇikā-vṛttāntah* (The Woman Taken in Adultery), XXIV. *Lasarasya punarj jīvanam* (The Raising of Lazar), XXV. *Yeśor jaitrayātrā* (The Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem), XXVI. *Yugāntasya lakṣaṇāni* (The End of the World), XXVII. *Antima-bhojanam* (The Last Supper), XXVIII. *Gadasimany ārāme yeśor yātanā* (The Agony in the Garden), XXIX. *Yudāsasya prāṇatyāgah* (The End of Judas), XXX. *Pilātasya vicāro nirṇayaś ca* (Pilate Tries and Condemns Jesus), XXXI. *Yeśoh krūśārohaṇam* (The Crucifixion), XXXII. *Yeśor utthānam* (The Resurrection of Jesus), XXXIII. *Svargārohaṇam* (The Ascension).

The basic story of this *mahākāvya* is taken from the four Gospels. But the author, without distorting the Gospel teachings and New Testament narratives on the life and message of Christ, using his imagination and poetical creativity, gives much more flesh and blood to the biblical story of Christ. The work begins with a brilliant *maṅgala-śloka:*

> *Jagatpatim gokulajātam arcitum vipaścitah samcarato nināya yā /*
> *punaśca kāvyadhvani me virājatām samujjvalā saiva śubhāya tārakā//*
>
> May the same brilliant star, which guided the wise men, who set out to worship the Lord of the universe born in a stable, shine again in the path of my poetic endeavours, so that they have happy ending (I.1)[12].

The second verse also calls our attention. The first poet *(ādikavi)* Valmiki wrote the great epic poem *Rāmāyaṇa* provoked and inspired by the immense pain he experienced at the brutal killing of a bird by a hunter. His *śoka* came out as *śloka*: the famous *mā niṣāda* ... Here the poet is inspired and encouraged to launch the sacred work of writing the life of Christ by the self-immolation of Christ on the cross: *jātmajasyātmabaler anusmṛtih sucetasām kam na kavim kariṣyati/* (I.2).

## 2.2. A Wider Perspective

The poet discovers, develops and presents with great poetical dexterity the untold and unrecorded details of the life and activities of Jesus. What are hinted at or alluded to in the Gospels are taken up and artistically elaborated into small stories within the overarching story and poetical plot. *Kavih krāntadarśih*, goes the saying, meaning a poet is one who sees beyond and behind the objects of experiences, which are conditioned by space, time and material dimensions. We, normal mortals, see objects, persons and events as they are presented to us through our senses and mind in their actual materiality, measurability and dimensionality. But poetical mind transcends and enters behind the presented objects and captures extra details, intense sentiments and new meanings of these things and experiences. Here the poet is on par with the sages of old, the *ṛṣis; ṛṣis* are also *krānta-darśis*. While the sages become transcendental supra-natural seers through the sublimation of the spirit and power of Yoga, the poets become supra normal visionaries through the power of imagination and poetical intuition *(pratibhā)* and connatural talents.

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[12] Prof. P.C. Devassia himself has translated his poem into English. In this text I am using this translation.

Thus our poet devotes two chapters (I and II) for the description of the betrothal of Mary with Joseph, which is mentioned in the Gospel in few sentences. Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth is emotionally charged and eminently tender in the vision of the poet in chapter five. Chapter ten gives a vivid description of the childhood stories of Jesus, which the Gospel, in an extremely matter of fact manner, hints at saying 'he grew up in wisdom before God and men' (Lk.2.52). Likewise portrayals of the birth of Jesus (VII), visit of the three wise men of the East (IX), marriage of Cana (XIII), Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (XIV), murder of John the Baptist (XIX), suicide of Judas (XXIX), etc. show the creative imagination of the poet and his superb mastery over the language. Thus without contradicting the real story and without compromising the orthodox beliefs on the person and teaching of Jesus Christ, the poet makes the life of Christ poetically more palatable and pleasing, and religiously very edifying and inspiring to the readers.

## 2.3. Poetical Excellence

The language and style of the work are simple, clear and straightforward. Prof. V. Raghavan judges the *guṇas* (the distinguishing poetical character) of the poetry as *prasāda* (lucidity and serenity) and *saukumārya* (tenderness and beauty). Dr. K. Kunjunni Raja opines that the poetical style of the work can be characterized as Vaidarbhi. The poetical metres used are mainly *anuṣṭubh, upajāti* in combination with *indravajra* and *upendravajra*. Main sentiment is definitely *śānta;* and the subordinate sentiments are *vīra* and *adbhuta*. Of course, *alamkāras* make a poetical work delectable and delightful. The common *alamkāras* used in *Kristubhāgavata* are *upamā, utprekṣa* and *arthāntaranyāsa*. I will come back to some of these technical terms and concepts related to poetics and poetical works later.

Sanskrit *mahākāvyas* have to work within the parameters and rules laid down by theorists and literary tradition of the country. It should have a particular number of chapters, at least eighteen; it should narrate childbirth, coronation of a king, marriage, description of a war, description of nature, a description of the sex life of the hero, etc. The story of the *kāvya,* being the holy life of Jesus, the poet is by force restricted in some aspects of such poetical conventions and *mahākāvya* tradition. In spite of these limitations, I believe, our poet brilliantly executes his poetical dharma.

Let me point out some examples. He describes Joseph as a very handsome, noble and at the same time a hardworking gentleman. He is a great artist, *viśvakarma dharaṇīgatah kim,* as if Visvakarma, the artist and architect of gods, himself has taken birth on the earth (I.6). Joseph is actively involved in the life of the community, is aware of his social responsibility and is concerned with the sad plight of his country under the oppressive Roman rule. But at the same time he is a contemplative, given to *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. The poet says:

*Dhruvam jalotpannam api svayam jalāt /*
*pṛthak sthitam padmam adhas cakāra sah //*

'He excelled the lotus, which though born in water, stands apart from water' (I.10). The dry and abstract piety of the middle ages, and the spiritual works of life-negating and world-denying authors of the past have portrayed Mary as an ethereal, numinous and other-worldly being, who is to be gazed at from distance in an awesome deference, and who is totally inaccessible to ordinary mortals. But look how our poet makes her an earthly and human person with charm and elegance:

*Kim indulekhā patitā nabhastalāt, kim ādimātā ca yahudīyāmbaradharā /*
*kim īśadūtas taruṇīāvapur dharo, vitarkam evam bahudhā prakurvatīm //* (I.32)

Is it the moon that has fallen from the sky? Is it our first mother (Eve) come in Jewish garb? Is this an angel in the feminine form? Mary's shapely form gave rise to such questions.

Look at the majesty of the following verse, in which the poet describes the sunset:

*Samsārārtiharam sanātanarasām yeśor mukhān nihsṛtām*

*premodgītisudhām piban praśamitottapo bhavan bhānumān /*
*samhṛty āśu karān viveśa vinayenāstādri-pārśvasthitam*
*sandhyārāga-kaşāyitāmbaradharo dhyānocitam gahvaram //* (XVIII.42)

> The sun, having drunk the eternally sweet nectar of the sermon of love that flowed form the lips of Jesus, which removes the tribulations of the earthly existence, calmed down, and instantly withdrawing his rays and putting on the saffron robe dyed by the evening sky, entered, in all humility, a cave by the side of the setting mountain, a fitting resort for meditation.

### 2.4. An Inculturated Gospel

One of the greatest merit of this epic poem is that it takes inspiration from the Upanisadic, Epic and Puranic literature of India and uses stories and characters of these classical works to explain the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Thus the author very ably tries to contextualize and indianize the message, events and incidents in the life of Christ and his teachings, and thus make them more understandable and enjoyable to the Indian readers, and suited to the genius and spirit of India.

The poet is bold enough to use the poetical freedom and state that Jesus as a boy took pains to acquire sufficient knowledge of the teachings of the Vedas, Upanisads, Puranas and of Buddhism (X.11-15):

> The supremely intelligent boy had often heard from the merchants coming from the East, about the Vedas and the Upanisads, and about the religion of the Buddha.
>
> The boy drank in like nectar the Puranas, which are rich in maxims like, 'non-violence is the supreme dharma' *(ahimsā paramo dharmah).*
>
> He held in great esteem Siddhartha, who abandoned his kingdom and set out in search of a way for getting rid of the miseries of this *samsāra.*
>
> To him, who was to offer his own flesh as food to his devotees, the story of Jimutavahana was indeed thrilling.

More than twenty-five references to stories, events or persons of the Hindu sacred books are made in the work to compare and contrast events in the life of Jesus. Thus Zechariah's offering in the temple of Jerusalem (Lk.1.8-10) is compared to Dasaratha's sacrifice with the help of sage Rsyasringa (III.27). Joseph wanted to abandon holy Mary (Mt. 1.19) as Sri Rama in *Rāmāyana* long ago abandoned the chaste Sita (V.34). A celestial voice announces the pregnancy of Mary to Joseph and she is accepted by him (Mt. 1.20-25), as sage Kanva heard the heavenly voice in the sacrificial room, which communicated to him the news of the pregnancy of Sakuntala (V.38). Sage Simeon desired death after seeing Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah (Lk. 2.25-32). This is compared to sage Sarabhanga who gave up his life after seeing Sri Rama, the incarnation of Visnu, in Dandaka forest (VIII.27). Just as Nanda, the husband of Yasoda, is the foster father of Krsna, so too Joseph, the husband of Mary, is the foster father of Jesus (IX.40). Kama tried to distract Siva in his practice of penance, but was destroyed by Siva. In the same way the devil tried to tempt Jesus in his practice of penance and was defeated by Jesus (Lk. 4.1-13) (XII.19). Young Jesus, who was possessed with faith and love of his Father in the temple of Jerusalem (Lk.2.46-51), is compared to the young Brahmin boy Naciketas of the *Kaṭhopanisad* who too was possessed with great *śraddhā* (X.32). At the command of Jesus a blind man bathes in the pool of Siloe and is cured. In the same way sage Ashtavakra, at the command of his father Kahoda, takes a bath in the Samanga river and is cured (XXIII.34). Jesus who was moved by the sorrow of the two sisters raises their deceased brother Lazar to life. This is compared to the revival of Kacha, son of Brhaspati, by Sukra at the request of Devayani (XXIV.38). One of the disciples betrayed Jesus. There are parallels to this in *Mahābhārata:* Drona and Bhishma were betrayed and killed in the Kuruksetra war by the treachery of their disciple Arjuna (XXIX.8). Claudia, the wife of Pilate, advises her husband to let Jesus go, like Mandodari, the wife of Ravana, advises her husband to let Sita free (XXX.43).

I am citing three verses here from the lives of Mary and Joseph. See how Joseph, when he heard the divine voice, was ready to accept Mary as his wife, as sage Kanva did not hesitate to accept the pregnant Sakuntala:

*Nidrotthitah sumatir iśvaradūtavākyāt*
*paryagrahīd bhuvanabhūtidam āvahantīm /*

*vāṇīm sagarbhatanayām adhikrtya daivīm*
*ākarṇya tām iva munipravarah sa kaṇvah //* (V.38).

Again, Joseph was betrothed to Mary. But even before the marriage, through the divine intervention, Mary became pregnant. Thus Joseph was put in a very delicate predicament; on the one hand he knew the innocence and holiness of Mary, on the other he did not want to provoke the condemnation of the people by marrying a pregnant woman. Therefore, he decides to renounce her secretly. The poet compares this situation with the critical position of Sri Rama in *Rāmāyana.* Rama knew the fidelity and innocence of pregnant Sita. But he was afraid of the accusations of the people, and he decides to abandon her in the forest.

*Satīm pavitrātmaniviṣṭagarbhām nindāspadam kartuṃ anicchur etām /*

*guptam parityaktum iyeṣa māni videhaputrīm iva rāmacandrah //* (V.34).

The marriage of Mary with Joseph is compared to the marriage of sage Vasista with Arundhati:

*Śrīmad vasiṣṭamunihastam arundhatīva*
*patyuh karāgram avalambya satī tadānīm /*
*ratnam suvarṇakaṭake ghaṭitam yathā sā*
*reje svabāndhavajanair abhivandyamānā //* (II.36).

Jesus Christ and his message need to be incarnated and inculturated into the culture of India. Christ and his teaching should be presented to the Indian mind using Indian concepts, symbols and language as articulated in Indian philosophy and spirituality. One has to present the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ as the good news to an India of religious pluralism, of immense cultural diversity, rich spiritual heritage, but at the same time an India that faces existential problems of huge magnitudes. Inculturation, therefore, is a process that aims at assimilating and integrating the local culture and recognizing and accepting the realities of life in its complexity by the local Church to use it as an important medium of living and expressing the Christian faith. Inculturation is a living dialogue by which both the partners of dialogue, namely, local church and its cultural *milieu*, are mutually influenced, enriched and enlightened. I want to quote two passages, one from a document of Pope John Paul II and the other from the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference:

> My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience, which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems. In India, particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought[13].
>
> The local Church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions, in brief, with all the life realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own[14].

Prof. Devassia does not use high theology or complex philosophical deliberations for this process of inculturation; but he uses his poetical talents and aesthetical sensibilities to show striking parallels in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ with the stories and events of the sacred tradition and holy books of India. In this way our poet has done a very valuable service to the Indian Church; he has eminently enriched the Christian faith and practices.

There are also other allusions to events in the Indian political context. The poet compares the Roman rule in Palestine during the time of Jesus as the colonial rule of the British in India (I.11). The cruel betrayal of Jesus by Judas, one of his own disciples while he was praying, is compared to the brutal murder of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a fellow Hindu (XXVIII.13), in an inter-religious prayer meeting.

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[13] Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio,* art. 72.

[14] FABC Statement, April 1974. Cf. Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arevalo (eds.), *For All the Peoples of Asia*, No. 12, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, p.14.

## 2.5. A Religious *Sādhana*

In India the spirit of religion and the imprint of spirituality pervade and penetrate every sphere of life. Thus, for example, philosophizing, which is normally an intellectual exercise and exertion of reasoning in the search of ultimate causes, is a spiritual act for Indians. It is *darśana*, the vision of Reality from different viewpoints. Even the Nyaya philosophy, which deals with logic and epistemology, ultimately ask questions concerning the eschatological destiny of human life and embodied existence. The science of medicine is an Upaveda (Āyurveda); it has to be exercised as an act of devotion to the supreme Being. Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* is sometimes referred to as *Nāṭya-veda.* Eating, a normal daily human need and activity, is a ritual act; it is a sacrifice offered into the abdominal fire. Even the union of husband and wife is a sacramental ritual, a *samskāra (garbhādhana). Artha,* wealth, and *kāma*, pleasure are *puruṣārthas,* goals or values of life, though subordinate and subservient to dharma and *mokṣa* (liberation) which is the ultimate goal. All the more, all works of fine arts are to be considered as acts of worship by the artist. Writing poetry, especially *mahākāvya*, is an eminent spiritual *sādhana*, which is to be executed with proper purity of mind, honesty of intention, concentration of one's energies and a consecration of the work to the divine power. It is Yoga; and as such it demands yogic psychosomatic disciplines from the yogin, the artist; control of body, of senses and of mind; one pointed concentration and renunciation of all other attachments. In ancient India all the literary works were religious. Religious and mythological literature of the Epics and Puranas is the mother and matrix of all, or almost all, literary works. It however, does not mean that fine arts are just accidental accessories or subservient subordinates of religion. No art theorist or art critic would insist that aesthetic and artistic approach to stories, events, persons, etc., and poetical cognizance of realities should be subjected to religious ideologies and doctrines. It is also to be noted here that moral instructions or dispensing of spiritual doctrines are not the primary objective of an ideal artistic poetical work. Delight is and should be its first and foremost objective. What I want to say is that religion and spirituality had a very firm hold on the life of people in India, and the spirit of religion permeates and pervades all vocations and occupations, all realms of life, and important moments of life. And artists were no exceptions.

Prof. P.C. Devassia is eminently a religious person. He undertook this great work neither to give free vent to his poetical imagination nor to exhibit his artistic competency, nor to secure the fame of a *mahākavi*, though all these might have encouraged him to embark on this project. But primarily it is a religious act and spiritual *sādhana*. He confesses that the contemplation on the passion and death of Jesus on the cross has made him a poet (I.2); he is narrating the supreme self-sacrifice of Jesus so that it may rouse sublime and noble sentiments in his heart (I.3). He dedicates the work to Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, and mother of humanity *(mayā kṛtam idam navam kristu-bhagavatam arpayāmi mariyāmbike tava padāntike).*

## 2.6. Artistic Evaluation

To criticise and evaluate serious poetical works, the critic needs to be almost a poet himself/herself. The critic should possess a high degree of aesthetic sensibility, poetic intuition *(pratibhā)*, artistic temperament and creative capability. The poetry has to reincarnate in the inner being of the critic. Poet creates poetry, and critic should recreate the same in himself/herself, so that he/she may enjoy the supra-normal poetical delight and may rightly evaluate the inherent merits and demerits of a given work. The difference between poet and critic is that of grade or degree and not of kind and category. Viewed in this perspective, perhaps, I am not eligible for the post of a literary critic. Still as a lover of poetry and as a believer in Christ, I am, I believe, entitled to pass some remarks on this work, namely, the *Kristu-bhāgavata*.

Literary criticism in India probably begins with the *Nāṭyaśāstra* attributed to sage Bharata, which might have been written between first century BCE and first century CE. Bharata concentrated more on drama, dance and music; but he has also laid down seminal rules and directives for good poetry. Later there was a long line of eminent theorists and adept technical experts of poetics who analysed the existing good poetry like *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata,* etc. (probably also Kalidasa's works), discerned the essential ingredients needed for ideal and perfect poetry and synthesised technical rules and codes of conventions for writing flawless poetry. These rules later became the norms of judging artistic beauty and aesthetic value of poetry, that is, for poetical criticism. Concepts like *śabda* and *artha, rasa* and *bhāva, alaṁkāra, vakrokti, rīti, guṇa, vṛtti,* *dhvani, abhidhā, lakşaṇa* and *vyaṅgya,* etc. were developed into complex theories.

The first among the ancient *(prācina)* theorists is Bhamaha (about 700 CE) who wrote the famous *Kāvyālamkāra.* Dandin who lived about 700 CE, (there are differences of opinion as to whether he lived before or after Bhamaha), is the author of *Kāvyādarśa*; Udbhata (after 750 CE) wrote *Bhāmaha-vivaraṇa* and *Alamkāra-sāra-samgraha*; Vamana (about 800) *Kāvyālamakāra-sūtra*; Rudrata (about 850) *Kāvyālamkāra;* Anandavardhana (wrote between 860 – 890) *Dhvanyāloka;* Rajashekhara (between 900 – 950) *Kāvya-mīmāmsā;* Kuntaka, *Vakrokti-jīvita;* Abhinavagupta (about 1000), *Dhvanyāloka-locana;* Dhanamjaya *Daśarūpa;* Ksemendra, *Aucitya-vicāra-carca,* and *Kavi-kaṇṭhābharaṇa;* Mammata (about 1050), *Kāvya-prakāśa;* Ruyyaka *Alamkāra-sarvasva;* Somesvara (1131 CE) *Mānasollasa;* Hemachandra, *Kāvyānuśāsana;* Bhoja *Sṛṅgāra-prakāśa;* Jayadeva, *Chandrāloka;* Visvanatha *Sāhitya-darpaṇa;* Jagannatha, *Rasagaṅgādhara;* and many others followed. Different schools and trends in the science of poetics were formed[15].

Bhamaha in his *Kāvyālamkāra* (I.9) enumerates the source materials or basic helps for poetical endeavour. They are grammar, poetical metre, dictionary, traditional myths and legends, worldly wisdom, logic and other fine arts. Mammata in his *Kāvyaprakāśa* (I.3) declares: "Poetic imagination, proficiency resulting from the study of the world, sciences, poetical compositions and the like, practice under the guidance of those who know poetry – these constitute the cause of its (of the poetry) origin"[16]. These things could be categorized in five heads: poetical imagination *(pratibhā),* proficiency in the use of correct and elegant language, knowledge of worldly wisdom, knowledge of other compositions and knowledge of the scriptures and mythology. Needless to say the Prof. Devassia possessed all these prerequisites to create his *magnum opus.* He learned Sanskrit under traditional pandits and in University College, and has been teaching Sanskrit for almost thirty-five years. He started to work on *Kristu-bhāgavata* at the ripe age of sixty-six. By that time he had already been acclaimed as a Sanskrit scholar and poet. He had already published several literary works in Malayalam and Sanskrit, and also had completed the translation of *Kathā-sarit-sāgara* into Malayalam. As a devoted Christian he was well-versed in Christian scriptures. As is evident from the notes in his work, he has read and studied scholarly works of numerous eminent authors on the life of Christ, like Abbe Constant Fouard, Ferdinand Prat, Guiseppe Ricciotti, Alban Goodier, Lagrange M.J., Giovanni Papini and Fulton J. Sheen.

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[15] For more details, Cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics,* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998 (IVth edition reprint)

[16] *The Poetic Light: Kāvyaprakāśa of Mammata*, tranl. by R.C. Dwivedi, Vol.I, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977, p.7.

Among the theorists of poetics one of the main questions discussed is: what is the essence or soul poetry? What makes a poetical work enjoyable to the *sahṛdayas?* The answers to these questions were different for different authors, and hence different definitions of poetry were proposed and propagated, and different schools of poetics emerged. Some of the older definitions of poetry are: *śabdārthau sahitau kāvyam (Kāvyālamkāra* of Bhamaha, I.16). More or less the same definition is repeated by Rudrata, Kuntaka, Mammata, Vagbhata, Hemachandra and Vamana. Visvanatha gives a famous defintion of poetry in his *Sāhitya-darpaṇa: vākyam rasātmakam kāvyam. Ramaṇīyārtha-pratipādkah śabdah kāvyam* is another well-known definition by Jagannatha in his *Rasa-gaṅgādhara.* The same author has another beautiful definition: *sahṛdaya-hṛdayāhlādi-śabdārtha-mayatvam eva kāvya-lakṣaṇam.*

There are at least five schools of poetics based on the answer given to the basic question: what is the essence or soul of poetry. (i) The Rasa School is headed by Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* itself. His statement *vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri-samyogād rasa-niṣpatti* is the basic *mantra* of this school. Lollata, Sankuka, Bhattanayaka and Abhinavagupta belong to this school. Each poetical work has the predominance of one or two *rasas* of the nine *rasas* and their corresponding *bhāvas*[17]. (ii) The Alamkara School: *Alamkāra* means a thing of beauty, and the figures of speech that beautify the poetry. Bhamaha, Udbhata, Dandi, Rudrata and others are the advocates of this school. (iii) The Riti School: This is based on the *guṇas* of poetry. Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* (XVII.96) speaks of ten such *guṇas.*

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[17] The *rasas* are: *śṛṅgāra, hāsya, vīra, raudra, adbhuta, bhayānaka, bībhatsa, karuṇa* and *śānta*. Their *sthāyībhāvas* are *rati, hāsa, śoka, krodha, utsāha, bhaya, jugupsā, vismaya* and *śama*.

Vamana gives ten with some differences[18]. Based on the predominance of one or more *guṇas* in the work, which are fostered and used by poets of particular regions of India, scholars of poetics discern two main schools of *rīti* (style), namely, Gaudiya which is said to be *paurastya* (the eastern) and Vaidarbhi, which is said to be *dakṣinātya* (the southern). But Vamana adds one more to these two, namely, Pancali (belonging to the Pancala country). Gaudiya has the poetical features *(guṇas)* of *ojas*, and *kānti*. This school is fond of the use of too many complex compounds, exaggerations *(atyukti),* poetical embellishments and powerful expressions *(gaudeṣv akṣara-dambarah,* [Bana's *Harṣacarita*]*).* The Vaidarbhi style has all the ten *guṇas*, but especially has predominance of *guṇas* like *prasāda, samata* and *saukumārya.* The Pancali specializes the *guṇas* of *mādhurya, saukumārya,* etc. (iv) Vakrokti School: *Vakrokti* is opposed to plain, ordinary, matter-of-fact speech. It chooses words carefully, combinations are striking, diction is extraordinary, sees thing behind the reality – all these are normally beyond the ordinary usage of language of ordinary people. Some say it is the soul of poetry. Bhamaha thinks that *vakrokti* is *alamkāra,* and that it is present in all *alamkāras*. Kuntaka, the author of *Vakrokti-jīvita* is the greatest proponent of this school. (v) Dhvani School: Most of the theorists of poetics agree that *dhvani* character is the extension of the concept and experience of *rasa*. *Rasa* is mainly applicable to dramas (remember Bharata is the proponent of *rasa* theory), which is an audio-visual art *(śravya-dṛśya-kāvya).* When it is applied to poetry we have *dhvani*. Poetry becomes enjoyable when it expresses more than the literal meaning, 'when it contains the charming sense of *vyańgya* ... only those words, which have particular qualities and are arranged in a particular manner and contains a charming *vyańgya* constitute *kāvya*''[19]. Anandavardhana, author of *Dhvanyāloka* is the greatest advocate of *dhvani* school.

I am now far away from the *mahākāvya Kristu-bhāgavata* of Prof. Devassia. But I purposely did this digression to come to the poetical temper, aesthetic make-up and artistic elegance of this epic poem. It had already been mentioned earlier that this poetical work is endowed with the *guṇas* of *prasāda* and *saukumārya* and that it belongs to the Vaidarbhi category of poetry. In fact, this is not my personal opinion. V. Raghavan has said it in the *Foreword* to *Kristu-bhāgavata*[20]. If V. Raghavan said it, we have to take it seriously, because he is one of the greatest and ablest Sanskrit literary critics and theorists of poetics of this century. R.C. Dwivedi, himself a scholar in Sanskrit poetics, dedicates his translation of *Kāvyaprakāśa* of Mammata to Padmabhusan Dr. Raghavan, and says in the preface to his work that Raghavan 'is our guru in the field of literary criticism'. *Prasāda* is translated as lucidity. It is the serenity and transparency of language. *Saukumārya* is tenderness, which involves gentleness and prettiness. The Vaidarbh*i* style is related to these *guṇas*. As opposed to Gaudiya style, Vaidarbhi is simple and does not use too many abstruse compounds, hard words and ostentatious phrases. This judgement is true. The language and style of *Kristu-bhāgavata* is graceful, sweet, simple and straightforward. Our poet avoids pompous and pretentious play of language and inflated and jingoistic phraseology and unwarranted expository articulations. Let me cite two verses as examples:

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[18] The ten *guṇas: ojas, prasāda, śleṣa, samata, samādhi, mādhurya, saukumārya, udāratā, arthavyakti,* and *kānti.* Cf. P.V. Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics,* pp.378ff.

[19] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

*Āgacchantam śrotum ādhyātma-sūktam*
*dṛṣṭvā yeśus tam janaugham mahāntam /*
*āruhyādrim tatra sārdham svaśiṣyair*
*āsīnah san vācam etām babhāṣe //*
*Dhanyās te ye svātmani syur daridrās*
*teṣam nūnam vidyate svargarājyam /*
*śokārtā ye te'pi dhanyā bhaveyur*
*yal lapsyante sāntvanam śāntidāyi //* (XVII.1-2)

These verses narrate the initial sentences of the *Sermon on the Mount*.

"The main sentiment delineated is, of course, Santa, to which other sentiments like Karuna, Vira and Adbhuta are suitably added as subordinates", says Kunjunni Raja, another eminent Sanskrit literary critic, in his Introduction to this *mahākāvya*[21]. Subject matter of the poem is the person of Jesus Christ, embodiment of love, mercy and compassion. The presence of his personality exuded the luster of peace and tranquillity. His spirit of forgiveness and forbearance disarmed even his enemies. His supreme sacrifice on the cross is the ultimate example of self-giving, universal love and the finest spirit of non-violence (*ahimsā)*. It is only fitting that the predominant *rasa* is *śānta*. As a poetical sentiment *śānta* means quietism, which is characterized by tranquillity and indifference. Its *sthāyībhāva* is *śama*. In fact, *śānta-rasa*, the ninth and last of the *rasas*, was not recognized by Bharata. It was a later addition. In the course of time poetical works were produced the basic and underlying sentiment of which was that of quietism, which did not fit in the eight accepted sentiments. Therefore, scholars of poetics were forced to add *śānta* as another *rasa*. *Karuṇa* is mercy and compassion. *Vīra* signifies valour, heroism and determination. And *adbhuta* is wonder and elation.

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[20] Foreword to *Kristu-bhagavata*, p.ii

[21] Introduction to *Kristu-bhagavata*, p.v.

> Without *rasa* the art would remain only an artifice. Rhythm, harmony, etc. are qualities arising out of the material handled by the artist. Any inventions of his genius superadded to natural forms are like ornaments. While *gunas* and *alamkaras* relate to the external body of art, the life-informing soul is provided by *rasa-bhavas*. While the former are within the reach of everyone, a cultivated aesthetic sensibility alone can enjoy *rasa*[22].

*Bhava* is the state of mind, in which particular emotional complex is produced instigated and inspired by the delight, the *rasa*.

The poet does not use *alamkāras* profusely. The main figures of speech (*alamkāras)* used are *upamā, utprekṣa* and *arthāntaranyāsa*. Kunjunni Raja says: “The Arthantaranyasa figures employed in this poem have a classical dignity and polish, and they often remind one of Kalidasa’s maxims”[23]. Then he quotes a number of examples, some of which are quoted below:

> *Mṛtir hi dāsyāt khalu māninām varam /* (I.14) ‘For honourable men death indeed is nobler than servitude’.

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[22] K. Krishnamoorthy, *Studies in Indian Aesthetics and Criticism,* Mysore: DVK Moorthy, 1979, p.15.

[23] Introduction to *Kristu-bhagavata, ibid.*

*Gṛhapradīpo hi vadhur hitaiṣiṇī* / (I.26) 'A wife who seeks the welfare of the other (husband) is verily the lamp of home'.

*Yūnām prāyah priyānandaphalo hi veṣah* / (II.1) 'Young men in general dress with the intention of pleasing their sweethearts'.

*Ahetuakām utkalikām upaiti snehārdracittam hi śubhe muhūrte / (II.15)* 'For, on auspicious occasions, loving and tender hearts are overcome by inexplicable anxiety'.

*Devasevaika-vratānām nihsvatā balam* / (III.3) 'Poverty may be an asset to those who have dedicated themselves to the service of God'.

*Vinaṣṭavitto hi vinaṣṭamitrah* / (XXII.15) 'He who has lost his money has also lost his friend'.

What are the objectives or purpose of composing poetical works? There is no doubt that the primary purpose of poetical works is aesthetic delight, experience of noble inner sentiments. Besides this imparting knowledge of religion and morality, sharing the experiences of life in the world, etc. are other objectives of good poetry. Poets may compose works for fame and wealth. The oft-quoted verse of Mammata is relevant here:

*Kāvyam yaśase'rthakṛte vyavahāra-vide śivetarakṣaye /*
*sadyah paranirvṛtaye kāntā-sammitayopadeśayuje //* (I.2)

Poetry leads to fame, procurement of wealth, knowledge of the ways of the world, cessation of the inauspicious, immediate bliss par excellence and it imparts advice in the manner of a beloved wife[24].

Bharata says that 'drama imparts solace to people who are afflicted by sorrows, bodily fatigue, miseries, and also to the ascetics'[25]. One of the main objectives of our *mahākavi* is definitely imparting moral instructions and religious values, and above all the knowledge of the life and message of Jesus Christ through the medium of poetry. It is true that Sanskrit is the language of the elite, of a privileged few, and is a symbol of the caste culture and brahmanic superiority, as opposed to the Dalit culture. Still there is a sizeable number of people, Christians and followers of other religious traditions, who can enjoy the work as a creation of art, at the same time imbibe inspiration from the holy life of Jesus.

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[24] Transl. by R. C. Dwivedi, *The Poetic Light, Kāvyaprakāśa of Mammata*, I.2.

[25] *duhkhārtānām śramārtānām śokārtānām tapasvinām /*
*viśrama-jananam loke nāṭyam etad bhaviṣyati //* (I.111).

Before I conclude this section, I should also mention here that the famous saying *apāre kāvyasaṃsāre kavir eva prajāpati / yathāsmai rocate viśvam tathedam parivartate // (Dhvanyāloka)* cannot be fully applied to the case of Prof. P.C. Devassia. There are two facts which put some kind of restrictions and constraints on him in his poetical pilgrimage into the life of Christ. (i) He is dealing with a historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, he has to be faithful to the facts of history. He cannot manipulate and distort facts narrated in the Gospels to suite his poetical adventurism. On the other hand, as a *mahākāvya,* his work should conform to the rules laid down by tradition and by the theorists of poetics. Some of such elements would not conform to the sacred life and teachings of Christ. One needs certain amount of decent decorum and sense of the sacred before such holy and noble life. There is need of dexterous balancing act. The poet is aware of this limitation and mentions it in the preface of the work. (ii) For Christians Jesus is also an object of faith. There are doctrinal statements and dogmatic articles of faith concerning the person, nature, life, message, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are very sacred and inviolable moorings of Christian faith. The temper and rigour in the matter of faith are much more exacting and unconditional in Christian tradition than that of Hinduism. Therefore, when a committed believer engages in artistic works about Christ, he/she needs to keep the ambit of his/her creative imagination within the boundary. Prof. P.C. Devassia, a believer as he is, cannot perceive Jesus as a mere object of artistic creativity and poetical curios, as a secular/atheistic artist, like, perhaps, the author of the "The Last Temptation of Jesus", would treat him.

Is there any blemish, or, what the theorists of poetics would say any *kāvya-doṣa,* in *Kristu-bhāgavata*? There is general understanding among such theoreticians that not to be a poet is no mistake, but to be a bad poet is an unpardonable mistake and crime! *Kristu-bhāgavata,* no doubt, is excellent poetry. At the same time a critical reader and an objective observer will not pass it as the best. If you read *Raghuvaṃśa* by Kalidasa and then *Kristu-bhāgavata*, you will feel and realize the difference. The effortless elegance, connatural spontaneity, the cultivated gracefulness and the sublime style of Kalidas captivate us. His works instantly take us to the heights of poetical delight. These elements you will not see in the same degree in *Kristu-bhāgavata.* Or, you read the *Nala-carita* or *Kādambarī* of Bana. His absolute mastery of language, awe-inspiring play of words, his inimitable ability for description, deftness in the use of words of double meaning, etc. will not be found in the same extent in *Kristu-bhāgavata.* Perhaps it is not right that we compare poet Devassia with these classical colossuses of Sanskrit poetry who lived in a different era, in the classical golden era of Sanskrit literature, steeped and saturated with high Sanskritic culture. What I am saying is that we cannot point to *Kristu-bhāgavata* and say here is the noblest and the most exquisite form of poetical beauty and aesthetic excellence.

It has already been stated above that the style of *Kristu-bhāgavata* is Vaidarbhi. Vaidarbhi style is known for its gracefulness, simplicity, uncomplicated word-sentence relations, structural explicitness, etc. Its *guṇa* is *prasāda*, lucidity. But if this style is pushed too hard, if the work is too simple and extremely explicit, it may not engender the desired poetic delight in the reader. *Kristu-bhāgavata* contains, without doubt, poetry of highest caliber and aesthetic eminence. But, rarely, here and there, the reader may bump upon verses that are dull and simplistic.

The most important prerequisite and the most powerful equipment a poet must possess to create good poetry is *pratibhā*, which may otherwise be called *śakti. Pratibhā* is poetic intuition, poetic power of imagination, creative power, etc. It is an innate talent or gift. Abhinavagupta in his *Locana* says that *praitbhā* is the power of consciousness of the poet which enables him to create extraordinary things. It is the power to produce poetry, which is charming and is endowed with clarity and proper fusion of correct *rasas.* One important characteristic of *pratibhā* is *unmeṣa*, which is said to be the fresh and powerful flashes of imagination.

Besides poetic intuition, two other instruments needed for the poet are *vyutpatti* and *abhyāsa. Vyutpatti* here means poetic culture and discipline and maturity of thought, and *abhyāsa* means constant training and repetition. These two *sādhanas* are to be obtained by personal efforts and hard work. "The Dhvanyaloka (p.169) makes it clear that if a poet has *śakti* (i.e. *pratibhā*), it conceals the defects that may arise from lack of *vyutpatti*, but if a poet is deficient in *pratibhā* and has only *vyutpatti*, the defects in his composition are noticed at once"[26]. Now the question is what is explicit and predominant in *Kristu-bhāgavata*? Without a great degree of *pratibhā* a poet cannot create such a graceful *mahākāvya*. But reading through the text, one may get also the feeling that the poet has, by his hard work, tenacious perseverance in the pursuit of poetical excellence and constant practice, that is, by *vyutpatti* and *abhyāsa*, risen to the level of a great poet. If he had an equal amount of poetical intuition, I feel, his work would have gained the poetical worth and artistic value of a Kalidasa poetry.

*Kristu-bhāgavata* has thirty-three chapters. The poet has a spiritual and emotional attachment to the number '33' because it corresponds to the age of Lord Jesus Christ. But to complete this magical number, the author has to drag and forcefully extend and elongate the plot of the story. It seems to me that this *mahākāvya* in twenty chapters would have presented compact, coherent and cogent work, which would have supplied the reader intensity of poetic experience, and would drive home the message of the work to the reader more efficiently.

## 2.7. Answer to the Hindutva Movement

Recent fundamentalist Hindu nationalist movement demands that Church and Christians have to become *svadeśis*. This demand contains a veiled accusation and an indirect indictment that Christians have no respect and regard for Indian culture and traditions; they have not accepted and assimilated the sacred spiritual heritage of India, and have not understood the soul of India; they do not love India, feel like Indians, and take pride in being Indians; they are alienated from the main stream national life, etc. There is an inherent inference in it, that to be a Christian and to be a true Indian is a contradiction in terms. I believe that it would be presumptuous and audacious from the part of a Hindu or any body to claim that Indian culture is a monopoly of Hindus. Every Indian born and brought up in this country, though his religious allegiance might be different, is an Indian culturally too. One of the exquisite flowers of this culture engendered by a non-Hindu is this *Kristu-bhāgavata*. This eminent work is a valuable and priceless contribution to Sanskrit literature and

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[26] P.V. Kane, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, p.350.

Indian culture. Prof. P.C. Devassia is not an isolated example. There are notable scholars among Christians in Indian philosophy, Indology and Sanskrit literature.

## 2.8. Universal Recognition

The merit and poetical value of *Kristu-bhāgavata* has been recognized by numerous national, state and private organizations of India. It has received so far nine awards including the *National Sahitya Academy Award* (1980) and the Award for *Samagra Sambhavana from the Kerala Sahitya Academy* (1993). Some of the opinions of eminent scholars about this work are quoted below. "Written in the accepted form of a Mahakavya and aptly called the "Kristubhagavatam", as it embodies the sacred life of the founder of a religion, and comprising thirty-three cantos corresponding to the years of Christ's life, the present poem is a major achievement in the field of modern creative writings in Sanskrit"[27]. Dr. Kunjunni Raja, a student of Prof. Devassia, writes: "The Kristubhagavatam by Prof..P.C.Devassia is one of the outstanding Sanskrit Mahakavyas produced in recent times. [...] is the first comprehensive work produced in Sanskrit on the life of Jesus; and Sanskrit can justly be proud of this achievement"[28]. "This monumental work of CHRISTU-BHAGAVATAM from the erudite pen of my beloved Professor Mr. P.C.Devassia is a landmark not only in the history of Christian literature but also of Sanskrit literature"[29].

*Krsitu-bhāgavata* had also become an object of research works and critical studies. A doctoral dissertation entitled *A Critical Study of the Kristu-bhagavatam of Prof. P.C.Devassia* by Sr. Pastor has already been defended[30]. Fr. John Kunnappilly, another Christian Sanskrit scholar from Kerala, has also prepared and published a *Prakriyā-bhāṣya* of *Kristu-bhāgavata.*

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[27] V.Raghavan, *Foreword to Kristu-bhāgavata*, p.ii.

[28] Introduction to *Kristu-bhāgavata*, p.iv.

[29] Cardinal Joseph Parecattil, *Apprectiations, op.cit.*,p.ix.

[30] Cf. Sr. Pastor, *A Critical Study of the Kristubhagavatam of Prof P.C.Devassia,* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Dept. of Sanskrit of Vimala College Trichur, University of Calicut, 1985.

## 3. Conclusion

Born and brought up in a Christian ambience and in a Christian family, but being an Indian and surrounded by genuine indianess, Prof. Devassia represents the harmonious blending and pleasant fusion of two powerful spiritual traditions and cultural currents: the Indian and the Christian. He is a committed Christian who has placed his trust and faith uncompromisingly in Jesus Christ. But he is also unequivocally devoted to Indian culture, thought and philosophy and to Sanskrit language. He avidly and ardently imbibed the spirit and knowledge from the great treasure house of Sanskrit literature. He was saturated with both the traditions that eventually it spontaneously flowed out in the form *Kristubhāgavata*. It is the climax and culmination of his strenuous *sādhana* in Gospel spirituality and genuine search into the soul of Indian spirituality, philosophy and culture.

[illegible] Theologians

A. [illegible]

Bose was brought up in a Christian ambience and in a Christian family, but he [illegible] and [illegible] to [illegible] influences. [illegible] Dr. [illegible] represents the [illegible] rigorous thinking and [illegible] [illegible] spiritual [illegible] and [illegible] contexts, the Indian and the Christian. He is a committed Christian who has placed his [illegible] and faith [illegible] in Jesus Christ. But he is also [illegible] devoted to Indian culture, thought and philosophy and to Sanskrit language. He ably and ardently [illegible] the spiritual [illegible] from the great treasure house of Sanskrit literature. He [illegible] traditions that eventually [illegible] in the form of his *Bhagavad[illegible]*. It is the climax and culmination of his [illegible] to [illegible] Gospel [illegible] and [illegible] and the [illegible] of Indian [illegible] philosophy and culture.

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